

GREAT BARRING-OUT AT ROOKWOOD

The Penny $1\frac{1}{2}$ Popular

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New Series.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & CO.—JIMMY SILVER & CO.—TOM MERRY & CO.



WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER.



THE HEAD'S SECRET!

A Splendid Long, Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Vernon-Smith Refuses to Get Up!

CLANG! Clang! Clang!
Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, opened his eyes as the rising-bell tolled out, and blinked along the dormitory.

The morning sunlight was streaming in at the window, and the juniors were already turning out of bed.

Vernon-Smith had no desire to do anything of the kind himself, and no intention of doing it.

He snuggled the bedclothes round him, turned his head on the pillow, and closed his eyes again.

The clang of the rising-bell died away. "I say, you fellows," came a sleepy voice from Billy Bunter's bed, "I think Gossy is ringing too early this morning. His clock's wrong."

"Get up, Billy!"
"Would one of you chaps mind cutting out into the Close and looking up at the clock-tower?"

"It's a quarter to seven by my watch, Billy."

"I believe your watch is fast."
"Oh, tumble up!"
"You see— Oh!"

Bunter rolled out of bed with the kind assistance of Bob Cherry's foot, and bumped on the floor in a tangle of bedclothes, and roared.

"Can I give you any further help?" asked Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"Ow! Beast!"
Harry Wharton crossed over to Vernon-Smith's bed, where the new boy had settled down to slumber again.

He tapped the junior on the shoulder, and Smith opened his eyes.

"Better turn out now," said Harry, kindly enough. "The rising-bell's gone."
"I'm sleepy."

"We have to get up at this time, you know."
"I don't at home," growled Vernon-Smith. "I get up at what time I like."

Wharton wondered what kind of a household that of the Vernon-Smiths might be; but from Smith's pasty complexion and generally weedy look, he could quite believe that the new boy had been in the habit of keeping what hours he liked.

"That won't do here," said Wharton. "We have to turn out at rising-bell—half-past six in summer. You'll find it all right when you're up."

"I'm not going to get up."
"But you must, Smith."

"Mind your own business!" said Vernon-Smith savagely.

Harry bit his lip. It was certainly hard to do the Bounder of Greyfriars any kindness.

"Oh, kick him out, Harry!" said Bob Cherry impatiently.

Harry shrugged his shoulders.
"Let him lie," he replied. "It's not my business, as he says. He can argue it out with the prefects."

And Wharton dressed himself. The Form went down, most of them glancing back curiously at Vernon-Smith, who was still tucked up in bed.

"There are squalls in store for that chap," Nugent remarked.

"Serve him right!"
"Yes, rather!"

And the chums of the Remove went for a run in the fresh, keen air of the Close before breakfast.

When the Remove came into the dining-hall for breakfast, Mr. Quelch was at the

head of the table, and his keen eye noted at once the absence of Vernon-Smith.

"Where is Smith?" he said. "Why does he not come in to breakfast?"

The question was addressed to no one in particular, so no one replied.

Mr. Quelch then turned to Harry Wharton, as captain of the Form.

"Where is Smith, Wharton?"
"I don't know, sir, unless he's in the dorm."

"Do you mean to say that he has not come down yet?" exclaimed the Remove-master, in astonishment.

"I haven't seen him down, sir."
"Someone should have awakened him if he did not hear the rising-bell," said Mr. Quelch, with a reproving glance at Wharton.

Harry bit his lip, but he said nothing. But Bob Cherry burst out:

"He was awake, sir!"
"Oh! Then he heard the rising-bell. This is very curious! Go and see if he is in the dormitory now, Wharton, and tell him to come down at once."

"Yes, sir."
Harry rose unwillingly from the table. He disliked the duty; the post of Form-captain had its drawbacks as well as its advantages.

But there was, of course, nothing to be said when he had received an order from his Form-master.

He went up to the dormitory. Vernon-Smith was asleep, and Harry shook him to awaken him.

The new boy blinked up at him.
"Let me alone!" he growled.

"Mr. Quelch has sent me—"
"Hang Mr. Quelch!"
"To tell you to come down at once."

"I won't!"
Wharton's brows contracted.

"Don't be a fool, Smith!" he said. "Can't you see that this is madness to buck against a master like this? If you don't come down, Quelch will send a couple of prefects to make you come."

"I won't come!"
"Very well."

Wharton quitted the dormitory, and went downstairs.

Mr. Quelch glanced up at him as he came into the dining-room, and so did all the Remove, and many of the fellows from the other tables.

"Where is Smith, Wharton?" asked the Remove-master, and there was a ring of deep sternness in his voice.

Wharton coloured awkwardly.
"He isn't coming, sir."

Mr. Quelch stared.
"Is not coming, Wharton! What do you mean?"

"He doesn't seem to understand that he's got to get up, sir," said Wharton, putting it as gently for Vernon-Smith as he could.

Mr. Quelch's brow darkened ominously.
"He will soon be made to understand it, then!" he exclaimed. "Loder, Courtney, kindly step up to the Remove dormitory and bring Smith down at once."

"Certainly, sir," said the two prefects. And they left the dining-room, and there was a hush of expectation, and even Billy Bunter neglected to eat in the general excitement.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Brought Down.

LODER grinned as he tramped up the stairs, and Courtney looked perplexed.

"The kid must be dotty," Courtney remarked.

"A spoiled brat!" said Loder. "The son of a giddy millionaire who made his money suddenly, you know."

"He'll get himself into trouble here."
"He's got," grinned Loder.

They entered the Remove dormitory. Vernon-Smith was wide-awake now and looking out.

He looked at the two Sixth-Formers, and felt a quail of uneasiness.

But he did not stir.
"Come, kid," said the good-natured Courtney. "You've got to get up. Bundle out."

His good-natured tone was wasted on Vernon-Smith. The latter quite mistook it.

"I won't," he said.
"Come, come!"
"Out you get," said Loder.

"I'm not going to get up."
Loder came up to the bed, grasped Vernon-Smith and the bedclothes together, and hurled them all over the floor across the bed.

Vernon-Smith gave a gasping yell as he bumped down, hurting himself considerably.

He scrambled out of the bedclothes, and stood panting.

"You bound!" he gasped.
"Get into your clothes!"
"I won't!"

Courtney rubbed his nose thoughtfully.
"We can't dress him," he remarked.

"Let me alone!" snarled Vernon-Smith.
"Mind your own business, you beasts! I'm not going to stay in this rotten school unless I choose!"

"I don't suppose you'll have much choice about staying, if you keep on as you've begun!" grinned Loder. "Get into your things!"

"Shan't!"
"Then you'll come down as you are!"

"Loder," exclaimed Courtney, aghast, as the prefect seized the struggling new boy; "you can't take him down like that!"

"Like that?" was certainly a rather startling state for anybody to go down in.

Vernon-Smith was clad in a suit of highly-coloured silk pyjamas.

"Mr. Quelch said bring him down at once," said Loder. "We shall get the sharp edge of his tongue if we go down without the cub."

"I know; but—"
"Do you feel inclined to dress him?" sneered Loder.

"No, but—"
"Lend me a hand, then!"
"But—"

"Lend a hand, you ass!" roared Loder. He needed assistance, for Vernon-Smith was kicking and struggling like a wild cat.

Courtney caught hold of his wrists, and grasped them tightly.

"Will you dress yourself, Smith?" he asked.
"No, I won't!" yelled Smith.

"Come on, Courtney!" said Loder.
"Oh, all right!"

And Vernon-Smith was borne, struggling and kicking, to the door, and out into the passage, and so on down the stairs.

The noise of the scuffling reached the dining-room before the prefects did, and the boys all craned their necks round to the door.

There was a buzz of excitement as the two seniors came struggling in at the doorway with the pyjama-clad form in their arms.

They rushed Vernon-Smith up to the Remove table amid a general titter.

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet.

He seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"What—what does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"Here he is, sir!" gasped Loder. "We've had a job with him, sir!"

"But in this state—"

"He refused to dress himself, sir."

"Put him down!"

Vernon-Smith was put upon his feet. He stood gasping for breath and shaking with passion, and an absurd figure enough he made in his pyjamas.

Mr. Quelch turned a stern glance upon him. "Smith, go back to the dormitory and dress yourself at once, and then come down here immediately!"

A refusal was on Vernon-Smith's lips. But the stern brow of the Form-master quelled him.

"Yes, sir," he muttered.

And he shuffled with his bare feet out of the dining-room.

Mr. Quelch glanced along the grinning table.

"Silence, boys!"

And his look was enough to cause silence.

Breakfast finished in a state of tension. But when the boys were once outside in the hall, there was an excited discussion of what had happened.

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Temple of the Upper Fourth.

"Here comes the boulder!"

Vernon-Smith was descending the stairs, dressed at last, and looking very savage and sullen.

He went into the dining-room with a scowling brow, and met Mr. Quelch at the door.

The Form-master signed to him to stop.

"Vernon-Smith, I shall report your conduct to the headmaster," he said. "It is too serious for me to deal with. Now you may have your breakfast."

The juniors who heard the words glanced at Vernon-Smith, expecting him to blanch.

The threat of being taken before the Head was generally enough to unnerve the most impudent—and after Vernon-Smith's recent conduct there could be little doubt that he would be expelled from the school.

But Vernon-Smith did not seem at all scared.

The sullen cloud on his face gave way for the moment into a grin.

Then he went to the breakfast-table, and Mr. Quelch, looking very puzzled, left the room.

The juniors looked puzzled, too.

"Well, he's clothed, but he's not in his right mind," grinned Bob Cherry. "I suppose he doesn't care whether he's expelled or not."

And the others agreed that that must be it.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Not Flogged.

DR. LOCKE was looking very clouded during prayers that morning, and many of the fellows noticed it.

Some of them remarked upon it as they left the chapel, and wondered what was "up" with the Head.

The Greyfriars' fellows were all very much attached to their headmaster, and most of them felt concerned at the idea that he might be seedy, as they put it.

Mr. Quelch joined the Head as he re-entered the School House.

"I have a rather important matter to speak to you about, sir," he remarked.

The Head's face clouded more deeply.

"I hope it is not about Smith, of the Remove?" he said.

"I am sorry—it is, sir."

"Is it imperative to mention it to me?"

"Certainly, sir."

The Head paused.

"I leave the boy in your hands, Mr. Quelch," he said slowly. "I do not desire to come into contact with him myself. Surely you can deal with the matter, whatever it is, without calling me into it."

Mr. Quelch flushed a little.

"It is a case of direct disobedience," he said.

"Yes?"

"The boy has refused to obey my direct commands."

"Well, you have the power in your hands to maintain discipline in your own Form, Mr. Quelch," said the Head, a little calmly.

"Yes, but—"

"Please do so without appealing to me unless absolutely necessary."

"I think the boy unfit to remain at Greyfriars," said the Remove-master abruptly.

"He is utterly undisciplined."

"Give him discipline, then."

"You intend that he shall remain?"

"Most decidedly."

"Very well, sir," said the Remove-master, biting his lip.

The doctor's face was very worried.

"I wish to—to give the boy a chance," he said. "He has had no training—or, rather,

he has had a very bad training. He has been allowed to run wild and do exactly as he pleased at home. His father has sent him here. Surely we ought to make some effort before sending him away again."

"Certainly, sir. But I fail to see any good in the boy."

"There is good in every boy, Mr. Quelch."

"Perhaps you are right, sir—in any case, it is for you to order," said the Remove-master.

"If I am at liberty to send him to you to be flogged, I may be able to deal with him. I caned him most severely last night, and this morning he was guilty of the most outrageous disobedience."

"He is a strange lad."

"He has a bad heart, I think, and continual severity to a boy is not pleasant to me, even if he deserves it, sir. His own people have allowed him to grow into this state, and it is hard that others should have to cure him," said the Remove-master, with some warmth.

"But we will leave it at that. I will at least be patient, and do my best with him."

"Thank you, Mr. Quelch. I may say," went on the Head, with some hesitation, "that I have reasons—very particular reasons—for wishing to make the best of this boy, and to make it possible for him to remain at Greyfriars."

"Very well, sir." And Mr. Quelch left the Head.

The Remove-master's respect for the Head was very deep, indeed, but he could not help feeling puzzled and annoyed.

In his opinion Vernon-Smith was more suitable for a reformatory than a public school, but the will of the Head was law.

When the Remove assembled in their classroom they did not expect to see Vernon-Smith take his place in the Form.

But he came in a few minutes after the rest, looking sullen, but without any sign of having been punished.

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath.

"He's still here," he murmured.

"And late," said Nugent.

"Quelch will squash him!"

But Mr. Quelch did not "squash him."

He glanced from his desk at the new boy as he came into the Form-room.

"Take your place," he said, "beside Snoop." Vernon-Smith went to the rear Form, and sat down.

The morning's work commenced.

Mr. Quelch, as was natural, devoted more attention to the new boy than to the others.

He wanted to see what kind of knowledge he had, to give him a suitable place in the Form.

The boy had been put into the Remove by the Head without consultation with the Form-master, and from that Mr. Quelch naturally supposed that he was fitted for the rank he was given in the school.

The Remove-master had a surprise in store for him.

The ignorance of Master Vernon-Smith was on a par with his impudence.

He was older than the average lad in the Lower Fourth or Remove; but his attainments seemed more suitable for the Second Form, if not the First.

It was not only that he could not construe the simplest sentence, but in such matters as spelling and simple arithmetic he was exceedingly deficient.

Some of the Remove giggled at his blunders, and others looked indignant.

There were duffers in the Remove, such as Billy Bunter.

But even Bunter could get through the Form's work in some fashion or other.

Vernon-Smith could not tackle it at all.

And, more than that, he had no desire to do so.

It was evident that he took no interest in his own education whatever, and regarded the work of the class-room as an unmitigated bore and nuisance.

Mr. Quelch wore a worried look after an hour of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"It is extraordinary that the boy should have been put in the Remove," he murmured.

"I should hardly have placed him as high as the Third. Yet he is certainly too big to be put in the Second. Greyfriars is no place for him."

Vernon-Smith looked more and more sullen as lessons proceeded.

He felt that he was looking ridiculous in the eyes of the other fellows, but this did not make him buck up; it simply irritated him.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch, when Vernon-Smith confided to him that he "believed" Lisbon was the capital of Spain.

"Have you been to school before, Smith?"

"No, sir; I've had a tutor."

"A curious tutor, I must say, who allowed you to remain in a state of such dense ignorance!" exclaimed the Remove-master.

"I only worked when I chose," said Vernon-Smith sulkily. "I don't want to do lessons every day!"

"Don't be ridiculous, boy!" said Mr. Quelch sharply.

"I'm sick of it!" said Vernon-Smith. "I never thought school would be like this, or I wouldn't have come."

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"Silence, Smith!"

"Pah!"

"Boy!"

"I've had enough of it!" growled Vernon-Smith.

Mr. Quelch took up his pointer.

"Stand out here, Smith!"

Vernon-Smith eyed the pointer, and eyed Mr. Quelch warily.

"What for?" he demanded.

"Stand out here!" almost shouted the Form-master.

The new boy slowly went out before the class.

"Now hold out your hand!"

Vernon-Smith put both his hands behind him, and clasped them there deliberately.

The Form-master could scarcely believe his eyes, and the Form could scarcely believe theirs, either.

"My only hat!" murmured Wharton. "This is a queer merchant!"

"The queerfulness is terrific," muttered Hurree Singh.

Mr. Quelch found his voice at last.

"Will you obey me, boy?"

"I'm not going to be caned!"

"Will you hold out your hand, or shall I send you in to the headmaster to be flogged?" said Mr. Quelch.

"I won't be caned!"

Mr. Quelch went to his desk and wrote a note, folded it, and handed it to the new boy, who took it in a rather uncertain way.

"Take that to the headmaster!" said Mr. Quelch.

The new boy grinned.

"Very well, sir."

He left the class-room.

The lessons went on, Mr. Quelch wearing a very harassed look, and a flush in his face.

The boys were very careful; both because the Remove-master was in no humour to be trifled with, and because they were sorry for the awkwardness of his position.

They knew that he wanted Vernon-Smith to be sent away from the school, and he had evidently been overruled in that matter by the Head's authority.

They waited curiously, too, for the return of Vernon-Smith.

They had no doubt that he would come back squirming and wriggling, and no one felt sorry for him.

A jape was all very well in its way, but deliberate disrespect to a master was considered "rotten bad form," and rightly, too.

Five minutes later Vernon-Smith re-entered the Form-room, and went to his place.

The boys could have gasped as they looked at him.

For the lurking grin was still on his face, and he showed no signs whatever of having been punished.

Mr. Quelch looked at him long and hard.

Then he compressed his lips, but said nothing.

What his thoughts were the Remove could not guess.

But he let Vernon-Smith severely alone for the rest of that morning.

* THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Boulder Does Not Play Footer.

IT was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday, and a bright spring day.

Most of the juniors were already at football-practice—Remove and Upper Fourth.

The fellows were practising shooting at goal when Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, strolled up.

He stopped before Loder, who was standing by the goal.

"How are the youngsters getting on?" asked the captain of Greyfriars cheerily.

"Oh, so-so!" said Loder.

"There's a new kid in the Remove who looks as if he'd be all the better for a kick about," said Wingate. "Smith, I think his name is—is he here?"

"Yes."

"I don't see him," said the Greyfriars captain, with his eyes scanning the footballers.

"I told him to come."

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"Well, he hasn't come!" said Wingate, with emphasis. "I should recommend you to see that he does come, Loder."

And Wingate walked away.

Loder snapped his teeth.

It had hardly been a reprimand; but several fellows were grinning, and Loder could not answer the head prefect and captain with the angry words he would have liked to utter. He had forgotten all about Vernon-Smith; but now he determined to let the new boy feel the weight of his wrath for having been the cause of that talking-to from the school captain.

"Where's the new cub, Wharton," he called out—"that fellow Smith?"

"I don't know, Loder!"

"Go and find him, then!"

"There he is!" exclaimed Bulstrode suddenly, as a figure passed within view.

It was that of Vernon-Smith.

Loder called to him:

"Smith! Come here!"

Vernon-Smith looked round, and came up unwillingly.

The prefect greeted him with an angry scowl.

"Didn't I tell you to come down to footer-practice?" he demanded.

"Yes, you did."

"Then, why didn't you come?"

"I didn't want to!"

Loder gasped at his reply.

"You—you didn't want to!" he exclaimed, hardly able to believe his ears. "I told you to come, and you didn't come because you didn't want to?"

"That's it!"

"Are you mad?"

"I'm not going to play football!"

Loder did not say any more.

He reached out, and gave the new boy a tremendous box on his ear, and Vernon-Smith staggered, and fell to the ground.

Some of the boys murmured.

Vernon-Smith deserved a licking, if anybody did; but Loder's blow was brutal.

The prefects were allowed to cane the juniors, within limits, but a blow on the ear was quite forbidden.

The murmur made the prefect glance round savagely.

"Do you cubs want some of the same?" he demanded.

The juniors made no reply.

Harry Wharton ran to help Vernon-Smith to his feet.

The new boy pushed him rudely away, and staggered up.

"Now get on to the field, you whelp!" said Loder. "Do you think I've got time to be bothered with you? Let him take a few shots at goal, Wharton!"

"Right!"

"I won't—"

"Come on, kid!" muttered Wharton, putting his arm through Vernon-Smith's, and almost dragging him along. "Don't play the goat!"

Vernon-Smith jerked himself loose.

"I won't play!"

"You must!" Wharton placed the ball at the boulder's feet. "Now kick—"

"I won't!"

Loder strode on to the field.

"Will you do as I tell you?" he roared.

"No, I won't!"

Loder clenched his fist, and advanced savagely upon the junior.

The prefect gritted his teeth, and, raising his clenched hand, he aimed another blow at the boulder's head.

Vernon-Smith ducked, and darted towards the goal-posts.

Suddenly he caught sight of a heavy stone on the ground.

He picked it up, and, turning quickly, hurled it at Loder.

Thud!

The stone landed on the prefect's forehead, and he fell to the ground like a log.

Vernon-Smith dashed away at top speed. He vanished among the elms.

"Great Scott!" muttered Harry Wharton. He dropped on his knees in the grass beside the prefect. Loder groaned, and tried to rise, and sank to the ground again.

Wharton raised him to a sitting posture.

There was a big bruise, rapidly darkening, on Loder's forehead, where the missile had struck him.

The prefect was dazed and stupid for some minutes.

Wharton called out to Bob Cherry, who dashed off, and returned with a cap full of water from the fountain.

Harry dashed the cold water into Loder's face, and bathed his forehead with it.

The prefect gasped for breath.

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"Thanks, Wharton!" he muttered. "Didn't that young sweep throw a stone at me?"

"Yes."

"The mad young rascal! He might have brained me!"

Loder staggered to his feet, and wiped his face with his handkerchief.

He was deadly pale now, save where the bruise showed up dark and blue.

"Where is the kid?"

"Bunked!" said Bob Cherry.

Loder nodded, and walked away, calling back to Harry Wharton to tell Wingate what had happened, to explain his absence from the footer-field.

As he went into the School House he met Mr. Quelch, and the Remove-master stared at him in astonishment.

"Good heavens, Loder, what has happened?" he exclaimed.

"It's that cub, sir—I-I beg your pardon—it's the new Remove kid!"

"He has not caused you that injury, surely?"

"Yes, sir."

"In what way?"

"Throwing a stone at my head, sir, because I was making him practise. He says he doesn't want to play football," said Loder.

Mr. Quelch's jaw set hard.

"I can scarcely credit the actions of that boy!" he exclaimed. "I assure you, Loder, that he shall be adequately punished for this. You had better go in and lie down."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch strode down to the football-field.

He found Wingate there, looking very grave and worried.

The captain of the school came up to meet the Remove-master.

"That young beggar's broken out again, sir," he said. "He's just downed Loder with a stone."

"Yes; I have just spoken to Loder. Where is Smith?"

"He seems to have vanished."

"He will vanish for good shortly, I think," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "He must be found and brought back at once! Do any of you boys know where he is gone?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

"No, sir."

"He must be found at once! Wharton, I leave it to you, as Form captain, to find him and bring him to me!"

"Ye-es, sir."

And Mr. Quelch walked away.

Harry Wharton exchanged a far from happy look with his chums.

The task imposed upon him was far from agreeable.

"I shall have to cut the practice," he remarked. "The young ass bolted towards the gates! He must have gone out."

"Looks like it."

"Any of you coming with me?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry. "He won't come back to be licked, if he can help it, and you'll want assistance."

Harry Wharton smiled grimly.

"I think I could manage that weedy waster alone," he said; "but I'll be glad to have you chaps with me. Let's get off!"

Bob Cherry and Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Mark Linley went with the Remove captain as he left the football-field.

Still in their footballing garb, they hunted round the quad and the gym for Vernon-Smith, and found him not.

Then Wharton inquired of Gosling, the porter, and learned that he had seen Vernon-Smith leave the school running.

The new boy had evidently gone out, thinking it best to give Loder a wide berth after what he had done.

"He mayn't intend coming back at all," Bob Cherry suggested, as the chums of the Remove turned out of the gates.

"Looks like it."

Wharton shook his head.

"I don't believe he intends to run away, kid. He's just bolted to keep clear of Loder. But, anyway, we've got to fetch him back."

And the Removeites started in pursuit of the boulder of Greyfriars.

The task was not particularly congenial to any of them, but they had no choice, but to obey the Form-master's order—at all events, in Wharton's case.

And his chums naturally wanted to help him, as the thing had to be done.

Wharton stopped in the lane to look up and down.

"Where is the rotter likely to make for, I wonder?" he muttered.

"Anywhere to get out of Loder's way," grinned Bob Cherry. "Let's try the village.

If we draw that blank, we can try the fields and the wood."

"Good!"

The Greyfriars juniors strode away towards the village at a good speed.

As they passed the bend in the lane, Bob Cherry uttered an exclamation, and pointed ahead.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There he is!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Buck up, kids, and we've got him!"

Vernon-Smith was about a hundred yards ahead, tramping on.

The juniors broke into a run, and as they did so Vernon-Smith looked round.

He scowled at the sight of the running juniors.

Their pace and their looks left him in no doubt as to what they wanted.

He broke into a run himself.

"Stop!" shouted Wharton.

"Belay!" yelled Bob Cherry. "We've come to see you home, you ass!"

Vernon-Smith increased his speed.

What the juniors meant to do with him he did not know, and he evidently did not want to find out by coming to close quarters.

He ran headlong into the village, and the juniors lost sight of him.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"We'll have him in a minute!" he panted. "What-ho!"

The juniors came sweeping down into the irregular village street, past the big, old elm outside the Golden Fleece Inn.

But Vernon-Smith was not in sight.

"In the tuckshop, most likely!" said Nugent.

"Let's look!"

They looked into Uncle Clegg's tuckshop. The old man was behind the counter, and he looked at them with a grin of welcome.

"Come in, young gent!"

"No pop to-day," said Bob Cherry. "We're looking for somebody. Has a chap just dodged in here?"

"No, Master Cherry."

"Sure—a weedy chap, with a face like a hatchet and a nose like a turnip?" explained Bob Cherry.

"No one ain't been in, Master Cherry."

"That settles it!"

The juniors trooped out again.

"He can't have gone in there," said Mark Linley, with a nod of the head towards the Golden Fleece.

Wharton's brow grew grave.

"Well, as a matter of fact, considering his personal habits, it's a more likely place than the tuckshop," he remarked.

"Shall we look?"

"Well, we'd better, I think," said Harry, after a few moments' hesitation. "The place is out of bounds, of course; but Mr. Quelch said Vernon-Smith was to be brought back. Come on!"

And Harry entered the inn, followed by his comrades.

He found himself in a bar, partitioned off from a similar one next to it, and in the next one he caught sight of a school cap.

"There he is!"

There was a sound of a hurriedly-slammed door, and the next moment the juniors were out of the inn, and tearing after Vernon-Smith, who had dashed down the path beside the inn into the long garden at the back.

A man in shirtsleeves yelled to them as they rushed through the garden, but they paid no heed.

They ran on, after the panting figure of the Bouncer.

The end of the garden gave upon the towing-path, and stopped in the reeds beside the water beside the Sark.

The Bouncer scrambled over the gate, and rolled upon the towing-path, narrowly escaping rolling into the river itself.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "This is as good as hare-and-hounds! After him!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors came whooping out on the towing-path as Vernon-Smith scrambled from the reeds, dishevelled and furious.

"Here he is!"

"Collar him!"

And five pairs of hands grasped the panting Bouncer before he could make an effort to flee.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Taken Back.

"LET me go! You hounds! Let me go!"

"Rats!"

"Chuck it, you ass!"

"Cheese it, I tell you!"

"Let go!" shrieked Vernon-Smith, struggling violently.

His clenched fist came violently in contact with Harry Wharton's face, and the captain of the Remove staggered back.

Vernon-Smith strove to wrench himself loose from the grasp of the others.

"Don't let him get away!" gasped Harry, as he reeled against a tree, his head singing.

"Not much!" said Bob Cherry grimly.

"Down with the cad!"

"Let go—Oh!"

Vernon-Smith rolled on the towing-path with the juniors sprawling over him.

He was pinned down by their weight.

He struggled feebly still, gasping for breath.

His face was dark with rage.

Harry Wharton recovered himself.

"You cad!" he said, in a concentrated voice. "Stop that fooling! We've got orders to take you back to Greyfriars."

"I won't go!"

"Won't you? We'll see!" said Harry, between his teeth. "You're coming back with us. You'll either walk quietly, or we'll give you the frog-march. You can take your choice."

"Hang you, I won't go!"

"Yank the sulky brute up!"

Vernon-Smith was jerked upon his feet.

He began to struggle again, gritting his teeth with rage.

"Now, will you come quietly?"

"No!" yelled Vernon-Smith. "I won't come at all unless I choose! I'll make my pater speak to the Head, too, and get you all sacked!"

"Don't be a fool! Come on!"

"I won't stir a step!"

"Then you'll get stirred!" said Nugent.

And Bob Cherry chuckled.

"In fact, there will be stirring times, Smithy!" he remarked.

"Let me go, you cads!"

"Not this evening; some other evening!" hummed Bob Cherry.

"Frog-march him!" said Harry shortly.

"What-ho!"

"The what-ho-fulness is terrific!"

With a junior grasping each an arm or a leg, Vernon-Smith was frog-marched along the towing-path. The juniors did not care to go back through the inn garden, but there was another way back to the lane across the fields.

Vernon-Smith still struggled furiously, and the juniors had all their work cut out to keep him from wrenching loose.

"Bump him!" said Harry grimly.

He had wasted enough kindness on the Bounder.

It was a time for drastic measures now.

And they were drastic.

The frog-march, with the bumping thrown in, was a new experience to Vernon-Smith, and to judge by his wild roars not a delightful one.

Every time he struggled with his captors he was allowed to bump heavily upon the ground, and after half a dozen bumps he was breathless, blown, and willing to come to terms.

"Stop it!" he panted. "Stop it, you fiends!"

"Nice flow of language he has, hasn't he?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop it!"

"Will you walk quietly if we let you get up?" said Harry.

"Yes!" gasped the prisoner.

"Put the brute on his legs!"

"Better keep hold of him, though," said Nugent, disdainfully.

"Yes, rather! You and Bob keep hold of his arms, and the others walk behind and keep an eye on him," said Harry.

"Right you are!"

With Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent grasping either arm, the Bounder of Greyfriars was marched on, with a sullen and savage brow.

The juniors crossed the field into Friardale Lane, and tramped on towards the school, the captured junior tramping sullenly in their midst.

Vernon-Smith cast angry and anxious glances from side to side as he walked, as if still looking for a chance to escape.

"Is the fellow hurt?" he exclaimed at last.

"Whom do you mean?"

"The fellow I threw the stone at?"

"Loder? Yes," said Harry.

"I mean, is he much hurt?" asked Vernon-Smith. "I didn't mean to injure him, only I wasn't going to have him lick me."

"It would have served you right," said Nugent hotly. "Loder is a bit careless now and where he hits, but you wanted a licking badly. And only a thoroughgoing rotten cad would fling a stone at a fellow's head."

"Only yourself, in fact, Smithy," said Bob Cherry.

"He is hurt?" asked the new junior, and the shade of anxiety deepened on his brow, and the juniors saw that the fear was in his mind that he had inflicted a serious injury upon the prefect.

"Nothing serious," said Harry, willing to relieve his mind at once. "It's a bad bruise, and Loder will have a bad headache, I expect, for some time. That is all. Only it won't be safe for you to go near him."

Vernon-Smith grinned slightly.

"I thought so," he replied. "Only if he touches me I shall call the Head."

"Haven't you even a rag of decency?" asked Bob Cherry wonderingly. "Don't you know that a fellow isn't supposed to sneak to the masters?"

"I shall please myself."

"Then it's pretty safe to say that you won't please anybody else," said Nugent. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I never came up against such a rotten rank outsider! One thing's jolly certain, though—you'll be expelled from Greyfriars for this, and it'll be a good riddance."

for, I expect, without our giving him any more."

"Faith, and it's right ye are!" grinned Micky Desmond. "I wouldn't be the rotten bounder for a great deal when he gets before the Head."

"What-ho!"

The juniors marched Vernon-Smith into the School House.

The prisoner made no resistance now.

In the doorway the Remove-master was waiting.

His face set grimly at the sight of the Bounder.

"Ah, you have found him, Wharton!" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Where was he?"

"In the—the village, sir."

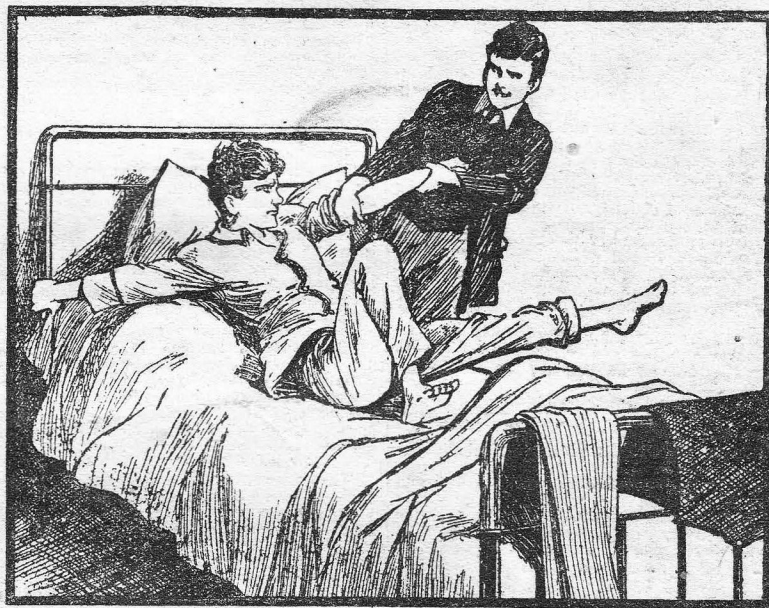
"Very good. Vernon-Smith, follow me," said Mr. Quelch. "You may release him, boys."

"Yes, sir."

The Form-master strode away towards the Head's study. Vernon-Smith did not move.

Mr. Quelch turned his head in astonishment.

"Smith, I told you to follow me!"



THE BOUNDER DECLINES TO GET UP!

Vernon-Smith sneered. "I shall not be expelled," he said. "That's more than the Head himself could do."

Nugent stared at him.

"Off your rocker?" he asked pleasantly.

"You'll see."

"Oh, come on!" said Bob Cherry. "Don't talk to the brute. He makes me sick."

"I'll make you sicker before I've done with you, if you don't let me go," said Vernon-Smith, with a snarl.

"We'll risk it," said Nugent, with a grin.

And the prisoner was marched on.

The juniors came in sight of Greyfriars, and as they marched Vernon-Smith in at the gates a crowd of fellows gathered round to stare at them.

Vernon-Smith's action was known by this time all over the school, and the general commentary passed upon him as he came in showed what the view was of it.

"Cad!"

"Coward!"

"Rotter!"

"Outsider!"

Vernon-Smith heard those remarks, and many others of the same sort, and he cast round a glare of defiance.

"The cad will be expelled, that's one comfort," said Hazeldene.

"Yes, he'll be sacked after this."

"It's a dead cert."

"Jolly good riddance."

"Never saw such a waster."

"Bump him, you chaps!"

"That's all right," said Wharton. "The Head will give him what he's been asking

Smith's brow set doggedly, and he did not move.

Mr. Quelch strode back, and grasped him by the collar.

The temper of the Remove-master was perilously near entirely giving way at that moment.

"Come!" said Mr. Quelch angrily.

And he jerked the new junior along the passage.

"Let me go!" growled Vernon-Smith.

"Come, you wretched boy!"

Mr. Quelch put pressure on, and Vernon-Smith was marched away.

He resisted savagely, his evil temper in a flame now.

For a moment there was an unseemly struggle between the amazed Form-master and the recalcitrant junior, and then Mr. Quelch reeled against the wall with a cry of pain. The new boy had kicked his shins.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

Vernon-Smith had time for nothing more.

With a single bound Harry Wharton was upon him, and he rolled on the floor under a swinging right-hander.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Quelch Resigns.

HARRY WHARTON put his foot upon Vernon-Smith's chest, and pinned him down.

Mr. Quelch had turned quite pale with pain, and he was gasping for breath as he leaned against the wall.

"Oh!" he murmured again.

"I hope you're not much hurt, sir," said Harry. "I didn't see what the cad meant to do, or I'd have collared him."

"Thank you, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, with quivering lips, controlling any outward expression of the pain he felt. "It is—is nothing. Please keep hold of that—that extraordinary boy, and bring him to the Head's study." Lend Wharton your assistance, Cherry.

"Certainly, sir."

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry grasped Vernon-Smith's arms, and jerked him to his feet.

Vernon-Smith made no resistance now.

Harry's heavy blow had made his head reel and ring, and he was too dazed to do anything but blink at the juniors.

Mr. Quelch limped on towards the Head's study.

He tapped at the Head's door and entered.

Dr. Locke was seated at his desk, and his brow was clouded.

He had a pen in his hand, but he was not writing.

He glanced with a troubled expression at the Remove-master.

"What is it, Mr. Quelch?"

"I am sorry to trouble you again, Dr. Locke, on the same troublesome subject," said Mr. Quelch firmly. "It is Vernon-Smith."

The Head's brow grew darker.

"Really, Mr. Quelch—"

"Really, sir, I have no alternative but to bring the matter to you. The wretched boy has assaulted a prefect in a brutal and dangerous way, and now has kicked me, sir—kicked me, his Form-master!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, his voice rising as he spoke.

Mr. Quelch was usually the most quiet and self-contained of men, but what had happened might have excited anyone.

His voice was almost shrill now.

The Head looked aghast.

"Mr. Quelch! Is it possible?"

"It is not only possible, but true, sir. Bring that boy in, Wharton! Thank you; you may go!"

Wharton and Bob Cherry marched the Bounder in, stood him in front of the Head's desk, and quietly left the study, shutting the door after them.

There was no doubt in their minds as to what would be the result of his interview with the Head.

Dr. Locke had been strangely lenient with the young ruffian so far.

But the greatest leniency must have an end.

Vernon-Smith was booked for the sack, as Bob Cherry put it; there could be no possible doubt about it in the minds of the juniors.

But in Mr. Quelch's mind there crept a doubt as he looked at the troubled and harassed face of the doctor.

Dr. Locke glanced at the sullen-faced boy, then at Mr. Quelch, and then back again at Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"What have you to say, Smith?" he asked at last.

"I won't be bullied!" said Vernon-Smith sulkily.

"Boy! That is not the way to answer!"

Vernon-Smith was silent.

"You—you have assaulted your Form-master," said the Head slowly. "Such an action is almost incredible! I begin to think that you must be weak in your head, Smith. Can you realise the enormity of what you have done?"

Vernon-Smith did not reply.

"In the first place, you will beg Mr. Quelch's pardon at once," said Dr. Locke, "otherwise I shall have no alternative but to expel you!"

Mr. Quelch started.

The Head's words hinted of a possibility that Vernon-Smith would not be expelled, after all, and such a possibility the Remove-master very naturally regarded as something very like an insult to himself.

He made a step forward.

"Is it possible, Dr. Locke—" he began.

The Head made a gesture almost beseeching.

"Pray do not say anything further yet, Mr. Quelch!" he said. "I desire to speak to this wretched boy. Vernon-Smith, do you not realise that you have acted in a perfectly outrageous and wicked manner?"

The boy made a sullen movement.

Dr. Locke waited for him to reply, but no word came from the sullen, sneering lips of the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"Smith! I command you to answer me! Beg Mr. Quelch's pardon at once for what you have done!" said the Head, but his voice was more persuasive than commanding.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 6.

Vernon-Smith broke his sullen silence at last.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" he said sulkily.

"You see, Mr. Quelch, he is sorry."

"He does not look sorry!" said Mr. Quelch grimly.

"I am sure he will realise what his conduct is like," said the Head. "I shall talk further to him on the subject, too. For the present you may go, Smith."

Vernon-Smith left the study without another word.

Mr. Quelch stood silent as the door closed. His shins were still aching painfully, and his temper, naturally enough, was in its most acid state.

Dr. Locke looked at him almost appealingly. "After what has happened, Mr. Quelch, I hardly like to ask you to have patience still with that wretched boy," he said, in a low voice.

The Remove-master was silent.

"It seems like asking too much," said the Head, "but—but I want to give him a chance. Mr. Quelch, I know it is asking a great deal of you."

"It is asking too much!" said the Remove-master stiffly. "You are master here, and have every right to admit anybody you choose to the school. But I have a right to retire from the post I hold if it is not compatible with my personal dignity to retain it. I shall have the painful duty of placing my resignation in your hands, sir."

Dr. Locke started.

"Mr. Quelch!" he exclaimed, as the Remove-master turned towards the door. "You—you are not in earnest?"

"Quite in earnest, sir."

"We have been together many years," said Dr. Locke, in an agitated voice. "You are my right-hand man in the management of the school. I have never contemplated your leaving me, Mr. Quelch, and it has always been my desire that when I retired from Greyfriars you should succeed me here as headmaster."

The Remove-master bowed.

"Thank you, sir!"

"But—but now—"

"Please don't imagine that I desire to dictate in any way," said the Remove-master, looking very much distressed. "But you see how impossible my position is. Unless my authority is backed up by the headmaster, how am I to keep order in my Form?"

"I know it. But—"

"The Remove are the most unruly Form in Greyfriars, but I have them well in hand. The harm the example of a boy like Smith may do is incalculable. The wider spirits in the Form will follow his example, there will be insubordination and insolence from one end of the Remove to the other," said Mr. Quelch. "How is it to be kept in check? By expelling some offender who has been led astray by this wretched boy—by visiting Smith's sins upon the head of one less guilty, sir?"

The Head almost groaned.

"The boy may not be so bad as you think, Mr. Quelch. The example of the other boys may improve him. He may learn better ways—"

"He is more likely to teach evil ones."

"Yet there is a chance—"

"You forget, sir, that he has assaulted me, his master, and before half a dozen of the boys of my Form!"

"I know; it is unpardonable."

"Either he must go, sir, or I must!" said Mr. Quelch firmly. "I do not desire to place you in any difficulties. I will remain till I am replaced. I will do anything to meet your wishes, except remain in charge permanently of a Form in which Vernon-Smith is allowed to be a member."

The Head bowed his face into his hands.

"I cannot understand your reasons for wishing to keep this savage—this hooligan—at Greyfriars, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "But I cannot remain if he does. That is all, sir."

"You don't understand!" groaned the Head. "No! Do you think I want him to stay? Don't you see that I would gladly be rid of the wretch—if I could?"

Mr. Quelch looked astounded.

"I—I— Pardon me, sir, I don't quite follow," he said. "I suppose you, as headmaster, are at liberty to expel a refractory pupil if you wish. The governing body would certainly never interfere in such a matter."

"The governors of the school would not interfere, Mr. Quelch—certainly! But—"

"There could be no other interference, sir, I suppose?" said the Remove-master wonderingly.

"The boy's father—"

"His father!"

"Yes."

"I cannot see that his father deserves much consideration, after the way he has evidently trained the boy; or, rather, failed to train him!" said Mr. Quelch hotly. "He had no right to send such an unmitigated young blackguard to a decent school, in the first place. I should certainly not trouble my head in the least about Mr. Vernon-Smith's views in the matter."

"But I must!"

"Must!" repeated Mr. Quelch, looking at the Head of Greyfriars as though he suspected he had taken leave of his senses.

"Did you say 'must'?"

"Yes, I cannot send this boy away."

"Cannot, sir?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I dare not!"

And Dr. Locke, as he uttered the words, allowed his head to sink into his hands again, with a groan.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Head's Secret.

"BECAUSE I dare not!" It seemed to Mr. Quelch that it could not have been the doctor who uttered those words; that cunningly contrived to imitate the human voice, so broken and unreal was the tone, and so utterly unexpected was such a statement from the lips of the Head of Greyfriars.

But it was the Head who had spoken.

He had uttered the words, and that he only too seriously and miserably meant them was shown by his attitude.

Mr. Quelch gazed at the bowed head, and a pang shot through him as he did so.

He realised that here was something he had not guessed, had never fathomed—some secret he had not suspected the existence of.

"Good heavens, sir!" he exclaimed, starting forward. "What do you mean?"

Dr. Locke raised a haggard face to the view of the Form-master. His face seemed to have grown years older.

"I mean what I say," he said in a broken voice. "I dare not send Vernon-Smith away from Greyfriars without his father's consent!"

"Why not, in the name of wonder?"

"Because I dare not offend his father."

"But why—why?"

"Samuel Vernon-Smith could ruin me if he chose."

Again Mr. Quelch could not believe his ears.

"Ruin!" he repeated dazedly. "Ruin you!"

"Yes."

"Is it possible?"

"It is true."

The Head spoke in a tone of concentrated misery that went straight to the Form-master's heart, and he realised that it must be true.

"This is terrible, sir," he said, after an awkward pause.

"I have found it so."

"I will not ask you to tell me any of the circumstances, sir, but—but is it as bad as you imagine?" asked Mr. Quelch incredulously.

Dr. Locke nodded.

"I am in his hands, Mr. Quelch. I need not explain how. That does not matter, and the story is not a pleasant one to me. I think you know me well enough," went on the doctor, raising his head very erect, proudly—"I think you know me well enough, Quelch, to be sure that I have not done anything that should have placed me in the power of a scoundrel—nothing, I mean, to tarnish my personal honour, or to render me unfit for the post I hold as Headmaster of Greyfriars College."

"I am sure of that, sir," said the Remove-master quietly.

"Thank you, Quelch. Mr. Vernon-Smith has a hold upon me—one I cannot escape, at present at least—and he demands that I should receive his son at Greyfriars," said the Head, in an agitated voice. "I should not have taken the boy—or, having taken him, I should have sent him away immediately he showed what an utter young blackguard he was—but—but for the fact that I am not free in the matter."

"Mr. Vernon-Smith insists; then, that he shall remain?"

"He is adamant on that point. He wishes his son to be brought up in what he considers a swell manner," said the Head. "That is the very elegant expression he used to me in speaking of it. He is a vulgar

and coarse man, but a very clever man, Mr. Quelch. With all his wealth, he could not get an utterly unlicked cub like his son into Eton or Harrow or Winchester. But he has a hold upon me, and he has compelled me to receive him."

"But—but—"

"It is infamous, I know—"

"It is blackmail," said the Remove-master. Dr. Locke bowed his head.

"It amounts to that," he said. "I cannot help myself. I received the boy, but though I knew something of him, I never expected such an utter young rascal as he has turned out to be. But what am I to do?"

"If matters are really as serious as you think—"

"There is no doubt on that point."

"Then I do not know what to say."

"If it comes about that the example of this boy really causes harm in the school, there will be only one course for me to take," said Dr. Locke. "I shall expel him, and resign my position as Head of Greyfriars immediately."

"Resign, sir?"

"I should have no alternative. I do not want the name of the school to be mixed with mine in the disgrace Mr. Smith would bring upon me. I should save Greyfriars as much as I could. But you will understand that I wish to try every resource before resorting to so desperate a step."

"Undoubtedly."

"That is why I have asked you, Mr. Quelch, to be as patient as possible with the boy," said the Head.

"Does he—does the boy know of this hold his father has over you, sir?"

"Yes," said the Head quietly. "When you sent him in to me for a flogging this morning, he threw it in my face, and I did not touch him."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"It is a terrible position, sir."

"You see, Mr. Quelch, that I must not come into contact with the boy. He is reckless and wicked enough to defy me, and I am helpless, unless I resign my position and make an open quarrel with the Smiths. I shall stave that off as long as I can, Mr. Quelch. I have my wife to think of, and my sister, and my little daughter." The Head drew a deep and bitter breath.

There was a short silence.

The Head broke it.

"Now you know the position, Mr. Quelch, and you can decide what you will do. I would have confided this to no one but you. You, I know, I can trust with my secret. If you wish to go, I will not say another word against it. If you care to remain and help me, for the sake of our old friendship, I shall be grateful."

"My decision is already made, sir," said the Remove-master quietly. "I shall remain."

"Thank you, Quelch."

"I will do the best I can with the boy, sir; and, at all events, I will deal with him alone, without calling you into the matter," said the Form-master. "I will do my best, and if there is a grain of good in the young ruffian I will try to bring it to light."

Mr. Quelch quitted the study.

His brow was pained and very thoughtful as he walked slowly away. The position in which the Head had confessed himself to be was a terrible one, and Mr. Quelch's heart had gone out to his chief.

But was the position so serious as the

Head believed? Whether it was or not, one thing was certain.

Vernon-Smith was to remain at Greyfriars, and Mr. Quelch had to make up his mind to make the best of it.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Stays.

THE Remove were in a strange state of uncertainty.

The conduct of the Bounder, and the question whether he would be expelled or not, dominated every other interest.

Bedtime came, and Vernon-Smith went to bed with the Remove.

"He's going to be expelled before the whole school in the morning," was the confident prediction of several fellows.

Vernon-Smith heard them, and grinned.

The next morning Vernon-Smith turned out with the rest at rising-bell. He took his place at the breakfast-table at the usual time.

The boys wondered how Mr. Quelch would treat him.

Mr. Quelch did not even look at him. The coffee-urn could not have been more unconscious of the Bounder's presence than Mr. Quelch seemed to be.

After breakfast the juniors discussed the matter in groups in the passages and the Close.

"The Bounder's not gone yet," said Skinner.

"He'll be expelled after prayers," said Bob Cherry confidently. "That's the most convenient time for anything of that sort."

"Looks to me as if he's not going."

"Rot!"

But Bob Cherry spoke with less emphasis than he had used the night before.

After prayers there was no call to the school to witness an expulsion.

The boys went into the class-rooms as usual, and Vernon-Smith took his place in the Remove with the rest of the Form.

There could be no further doubt about it. He was not to be expelled.

The juniors could not blink the disagreeable truth any longer.

The Bounder was not to be expelled; he was to remain at Greyfriars—and, apparently, he was not to be even flogged.

The juniors could not understand it.

It was a deep mystery to them; but there was no doubting the fact any longer.

Vernon-Smith, after his outrageous actions, was to remain a member of the Remove.

There was a great deal of suppressed indignation in the Form.

It was bottled up during morning lessons, but when the boys were dismissed it found a free vent.

"Then the cad's staying!" said Nugent.

"The unspeakable rotter!"

"It's a disgrace to the Form!"

"And to the school!"

"The disgracefulness is terrific!"

"There ought to be a protest!"

"Somebody ought to speak to the Head!"

"Shame!"

The Bounder stood with a disagreeable grin on his face, looking at the indignant juniors.

Far from friendly glances were turned upon him.

But for the fact that there were masters close at hand he would probably have been seized and ragged at that moment.

"Well," he said, with a sneer, "I'm still here, you see."

"Rotter!"

"Worm!"

"And I'll jolly well stay as long as I like!" said the Bounder between his teeth.

"And I'll make some of you sorry for yourselves before I've done with you!"

"Listen to the cad!" said Bob Cherry.

"My only hat! I've a jolly good mind to put it straight to Quelch, and tell him it's a shame to let the cad stick here!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Quelch can't do anything more than the Head can!" said Vernon-Smith, with a sneer.

Wharton set his teeth, and strode straight up to the new boy.

Vernon-Smith made a backward step, but Wharton did not touch him.

That was not his intention, as yet, at all events.

"I don't know how it is you're not expelled, you miserable cad," said Wharton quietly. "You ought to be, and you know it. The Head has his own reasons, I suppose, and it's no business of ours. But this is our business. You sha'n't speak in that caddish way of either the Head or Mr. Quelch."

"I'll do as I like."

"You won't. You'll speak respectfully of the Head, who's a good old sport, and of Mr. Quelch, who's our Form-master. The other masters you can slang as much as you like. Mind, I'm not joking with you. Speak of either of them again in the way you've done, and I'll knock you flying!"

"Hear, hear!"

Wharton meant every word he said, as his gleaming and angry eyes told even more plainly than his voice.

The Bounder was silent and scowling.

"And more than that," went on the captain of the Remove. "I may as well finish while I'm on the subject. We sha'n't allow any more of your rotting. For some reason, the Head chooses not to sack you. But you're not going to disgrace Greyfriars, and you're not going to give the other Forms an excuse for turning up their noses at the Remove. Do you understand me?"

"I shall please myself."

"You will please us," said Wharton coolly.

"If you start pleasing yourself in these matters, you won't be pleased with the result, I can tell you. Mind, at the first sign of kicking over the traces we'll rag it out of you; and when the Remove start ragging, it's something not easy or gentle, I can tell you. That's fair warning. If you choose to try to play the game, we'll try to get used to you and give you a chance. If you begin any more of your caddish tricks, we'll rag you till you'll be as glad to get out of Greyfriars as if it were a fiery furnace. That's all."

And Wharton strode away without another word or look to the cad of the Remove.

"And we all back Wharton up," added Bob Cherry. "Remember that. Try to play the game, and we'll give you a chance."

The Bounder did not reply.

He remained standing sullenly silent as the Remove trooped out into the Close, and there was a dark scowl upon his face.

He had plenty of food for thought as he slouched away at last with a dark brow, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

The Head could not sack him.

Mr. Quelch was bound to tolerate him in the Form.

But he had to deal now with the Remove itself, and unless he mended his ways things were likely to go hard with the Bounder of Greyfriars.

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER. In the Dead of Night.

BOOM!

The hour of one tolled from the old clock-tower at Rookwood.

The school lay buried in silence and slumber.

At that hour, certainly, no one was supposed to be awake in the ancient edifice.

The last light had long been extinguished, the last door had been closed, the most determined "swot" had long ceased to burn the midnight oil.

On the Modern side all was as it should be—masters and boys were sound asleep.

But on the Classical side there was one who was awake—very wide-awake indeed.

The one wakeful individual was Jimmy Silver of the Fourth Form.

Jimmy was sitting up in bed while his Form-fellows were lying asleep round him.

To tell the truth, Jimmy Silver had had hard work to keep awake so late.

He had almost had to prop his eyelids open. But he had not succumbed.

There was a most important enterprise fixed for that night.

It was an enterprise into which nearly all the Classical members of the Fourth Form entered with heart and soul.

And one o'clock was the hour for action!

Jimmy Silver, with heroic self-sacrifice, had promised to remain awake until that hour struck, and call the others.

And he was still awake, which was very fortunate for the important enterprise, because the rest of the Form were sleeping like tops.

True, his chums—Lovell and Raby and Newcome—had all declared that they would keep awake, too, to keep him company.

They had kept awake till about eleven, and then their breathing announced that they had glided away into the arms of Morpheus.

But Jimmy Silver did not mind.

He pinched himself hard every now and then, when he felt drowsiness coming over him.

And he was very glad to hear the stroke of one boom through the night.

He felt that he could no longer "stuck it out" for half an hour longer.

The stroke had barely died away when Jimmy Silver was out of bed.

He shivered a little; the wind was cold.

But before he was dressed, he proceeded to awaken the partners in the great enterprise.

Lovell came out of the land of dreams with a jerk as Jimmy Silver grasped him gently, but firmly, by the hair.

"Grooooooh!" said Lovell lucidly.

"Wake up, slacker!"

"Grooooooh! Yaroooh!" murmured Lovell sleepily. "Gerroff! Gerraway! 'Tain't visir'-bell!"

"Fathead! It's one o'clock!"

"Lemme lone! Grooh!"

Jimmy Silver tightened his grasp upon Lovell's curly hair, and gave a tug.

Then Lovell was broad-awake.

Had he been one of the Seven Sleepers he could hardly have remained dozing after that.

"Yow!" howled Lovell. "Leggo, you thumping ass! Yow! My hat!"

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver warningly. "Do you want to wake up the whole House? Do you want old Manders to drop on us, you dummy?"

Lovell rubbed his head, and glared at his chum in the gloom.

"You silly ass! No need to lug my hair out by the roots! Yow! Look here, are you quite sure it's one o'clock?"

"Just struck!"

"Well, suppose we leave it till two o'clock?" said Lovell, blinking. "On second thoughts, THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 6.

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two o'clock is better than one— Yow-ow-ow! Wharrer at, you silly ass?"

Bump!

Lovell descended on the floor, tangled up with his bedclothes, and he struggled wildly with his blankets and sheets, breathing vengeance; and Jimmy Silver chuckled, and proceeded to the next bed.

The next bed was Raby's, and Raby had been awakened by Lovell's remarks.

He blinked nervously at Jimmy Silver.

"I say, Jimmy—"

"Oh, you're awake! Out you come!"

"Just a minute, Silver! No hurry! I—I've been thinking we'd better leave it till tomorrow night; it's jolly cold, and— If you don't leggo my ear, you beast, I'll lick you like thunder! Ow!"

Raby bumped on the floor, and Jimmy crossed to Newcome's bed.

Newcome was snoring.

As Newcome was not in the habit of snoring, Jimmy Silver suspected that snore.

"Jump up, Newcome!"

Snore!

"It's time, Newcome!"

Snore!

Jimmy Silver took a sponge from the nearest washstand, and dipped it into a basin of water.

Perhaps Newcome heard him, for he ceased snoring all of a sudden, and sat up in bed.

"That you, Silver?"

"Yes, it's me! I'm just going to squeeze some cold water over you!"

Newcome was out of bed with a bound.

"That's better!" said Jimmy Silver approvingly.

"Turn out, you slackers!" growled Lovell.

Now that Lovell was out of bed he was justly indignant that so many slackers were between the sheets.

"I—I—I say," said Jones minor, sitting up in bed. "I think, Silver, old man—if you bring that sponge near me I'll smash you!"

I think, you know, that a barring-out is a really rotten idea, after all, and it's c-c-cold— Ooooch!"

Jones minor "ooched!" frantically as the sponge was squeezed over him, drenching his head and face with icy water.

He rolled out on the other side of the bed with great promptness.

Jimmy Silver's methods of awakening his Form-fellows were successful.

The Fourth-Formers were turning out now without waiting for the wet sponge.

Only two remained in bed—Townsend and Topham, the champion slackers of the Fourth.

"Look here," mumbled Townsend. "I tell you I'm not in this, Silver! I don't believe in a barring-out. We shall get into a frightful row. Old Manders will get his hair off, and he'll report us to the Head when he comes back! I'm not going to have a hand in it! Now you understand me, I'm not going to have a hand in— Grrroooh!"

Townsend tumbled out, drenched with icy water.

He glared ferociously at Jimmy Silver in the gloom.

Topham jumped out without waiting for the sponge, and the two slackers began to dress themselves hurriedly.

The rest of the juniors were dressing themselves rapidly, and shivering and yawning.

"I think it's all rot!" mumbled Townsend.

"It's kik-cold. There'll be a flogging all round for it, so we may as well take it at first as at last."

"Rats! We're going to make terms with Manders before we surrender," said Lovell.

"We'll bring the Modern beast to reason!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And when the Head comes back he'll pat us on the back for upholding the rights of the Classic side against the Moderns."

"Ahem!" said Lovell.

That prospect seemed to him, to say the least of it, doubtful.

He could hardly imagine the Head of Rookwood approving of a barring-out, under any circumstances.

"We're in the right, ain't we?" demanded Jimmy.

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then, that's enough! Buck up!"

And with a mingling of mumbling, grumbling, yawning, and shivering, the rebels of Rookwood hurried on their clothes in the dark dormitory.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Plan of Campaign.

BARRING-OUT!

That was the important enterprise which had called the Fourth-Formers from their beds that cold night.

It was an unprecedented happening at Rookwood; but, as Jimmy Silver pointed out, all the more likely to be successful on that account.

For the masters—the tyrants, as Jimmy Silver referred to them—would have no suspicion of what was going on till they woke up in the morning.

And then they would find the rebels entrenched, and prepared to defy all comers.

It happened that the masters on the Classical side had been the unhappy victims of an onslaught by the demon influenza.

They were either away or in the sanatorium.

It was natural that, under those circumstances, the Head should appoint the senior Modern master—Mr. Manders—to take his place during his absence.

Even the Classical juniors admitted that much, but it wasn't natural that Mr. Manders should play the "giddy tyrant."

The Fourth Form had been placed under a prefect while their Form-master was on the sick-list.

Mr. Manders had chosen a Modern prefect instead of a Classical, which was the first injury.

And that prefect Knowles was a bully and a tyrant, and he had come down heavy on the Classical heroes.

And for ragging Knowles in the Form-room the whole body of Classical Fourth-Formers had been sentenced to a flogging, which was to take place in Big Hall before the whole school, and then they were to continue under the charge of Knowles, who, of course, would be more unpleasant than ever after the ragging they had given him.

But Jimmy Silver & Co. did not mean that flogging to come off.

For Classics to be flogged by a Modern master, and then bullied by a prefect, was a little too thick.

Hence the scheme of barring-out.

In the morning, instead of the Classics coming meekly into Big Hall, to allow Mr. Manders to go through his gymnastic exercises with the birch, they would be secure behind their entrenchments, to hold out till the tyrant came to terms. At least, that was the programme.

How the programme would work out was another matter.

But, at least, the heroes of the Fourth were in a state of deadly determination.

In the silence of the night the rebels dressed themselves.

The rest of the House was buried in silence.

Only the Fourth were concerned in the great enterprise.

Jimmy Silver had great doubts about the other Forms backing them up.

And, besides, the Fourth were the injured party.

Townsend and Topham grumbled, but the rest were growing more cheerful as they moved quickly in the darkness.

"I think it's all rot!" Townsend declared for the tenth time. "Besides, how are we going to bar 'em out?"

"Leave that to me," said Jimmy Silver serenely, as he laced his boots.

"We can't bar 'em out of the House, as they're all in the House," said Townsend. "No good barring 'em out of the dorm. They'd jolly soon starve us out."

"Quite so," agreed Silver. "No good at all."

"Well, the Form-room, then," said Townsend. "What's the good of barring ourselves in the Form-room? There's no grub there."

"Form-room's no good," agreed Jimmy Silver.

"Well, then, you ass—"

"Blessed if I see where we're going to hold the fort!" said Hooker.

"Then it's lucky you've me to do the thinking for you," said Jimmy Silver calmly. "That's all settled. We've got to select a place where we can hold out, where there's plenty of grub, water laid on, and room for the lot of us."

"But there ain't such a place!" howled Topham. "You're talking out of your neck, you silly chump!"

"Fathhead! The tuck-shop!"

"The—the tuck-shop!"

"My hat!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Why you—you, maniac!" said Townsend, aghast. "Sergeant Kettle sleeps in the room over the tuckshop!"

"I know that!"

"Well, then, do you think he'll let us collar the place?"

"He won't be able to help it," chuckled Jimmy Silver. "We're going to collar him first."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Oh, my word!" murmured Raby.

"If anybody's got a better plan let him get it off his chest," said Jimmy Silver. "If not, dry up!"

There was a buzz of excitement in the dormitory now.

Jimmy Silver's plan exactly "jumped" with the ideas of most of the juniors.

The mere thought of having the free run of the tuck-shop spurred them on.

"But old Kettle won't let us collar him!" shrieked Townsend.

"Bow-wow! We sha'n't ask his permission."

"And we can't take his tuck, either—"

"Of course, we shall keep account of all we use, and pay for it afterwards," said Jimmy Silver. "We may be able to make old Manders pay for it, as one of the conditions of peace."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I tell you—" vociferated Townsend.

"Oh, dry up! You'll wake the House. You fellows ready?"

"Ready, aye ready!" chuckled Raby.

"Then come on! Gather up your bedclothes!"

"Bedclothes?" said Lovell.

"Certainly! We shall want them to-morrow night!"

"To-morrow night!" snorted Townsend. "Do you think it will last over to-morrow night, you fathhead?"

"Shut up! Get all the blankets, sheets, bolsters, and pillows. We shall need the pillows, especially if we're attacked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors cleared the beds, rolling the bedclothes into bundles.

That forethought on the part of Jimmy Silver proved that they had a good general—indeed, Raby, remarked that he was a regular Foch.

Laden with the bedclothes, the juniors crept cautiously out of the dormitory.

Topham and Townsend, though grumbling, went with the rest.

And on tiptoe, with immense caution, Jimmy Silver and his followers crept down the silent staircase.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Capturing the Fortress.

SAVE for the creaking of the stairs under the cautious tread of the juniors there was no sound in the old building.

Silence and darkness surrounded them.

The hearts of the Rookwood rebels were beating hard.

If a master or a prefect should awaken and come out of his room, it was "all up" with the great enterprise.

If Bulkeley, the captain of the school, had opposed them, they would have hesitated very much before handling him.

But Jimmy Silver had passed the word

along that if Mr. Manders came along he was to be chucked out, temporary headmaster as he was.

Fortunately for Mr. Manders, and fortunately perhaps for the juniors, the Modern master did not come along.

The army reached the lower hall, and there was a halt. The big door was locked, and there was no exit that way.

Jimmy Silver, after a moment's thought, led the way to the back of the House.

All the doors were secured, but Silver promptly opened a window.

Lovell jumped out first, and the bundles were passed out to him, and then the rest of the rebels followed.

Jimmy Silver cautiously closed the window behind him.

They were in the open air now, in the clear starlight. Still with cautious steps, they stole round the House and came into the quadrangle.

Then like ghosts they flitted away across the quad.

The success so far had inspired them. The prospect of a free feed in a tuckshop, as soon as they had captured that fortress, was still more inspiring.

Excitement was growing, and they were

The chief difficulty lay in the fact that Sergeant Kettle was still in charge of the fortress. Doors and windows were fastened.

The Fourth-Formers deposited their bundles on the ground, and held a consultation.

"We've simply got to get in!" said Jimmy Silver. "Try all the windows at the back!"

The windows were tried, but they were all fastened. The old sergeant was a very careful and methodical man. There was another pause.

"Suppose we chuck it?" said Townsend.

"Biff him, somebody!" grunted Silver.

There was a yelp from Townsend.

"What's to be done, Silver?" demanded Lovell.

It was evidently "up" to Jimmy Silver. Even Lovell, who was supposed to be Classical leader in the Fourth, left it to him. But Jimmy Silver was equal to the emergency.

"If Mahomet can't get to the giddy mountain, the giddy mountain has to come to Mahomet!" he replied. "It would make a row to bust a way in. So we've got to bring the old Kettle down here to open the door!"

"But—but he won't come!" said Raby.

"Oh, yes, he'll come! You fellows get into cover—"



THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE REBELLION!

ready for the fray. Even Townsend and Topham had ceased to grumble.

The school shop of Rookwood was on the ground floor of the old clock-tower.

That tower was one of the oldest parts of Rookwood, and had long been disused.

There was a new clock-tower on the Modern side—brand-new, as the Classics would say, with a sniff of contempt.

As a matter of fact, the new clock-tower had been standing for a quarter of a century.

The old one was abandoned, the clock being long gone, and the top storey with it. The lower part of the building was tenanted by old Kettle, the school sergeant, who kept the tuckshop.

A little diamond-paned window, with a few tarts exposed to view, revealed the fact that the tuckshop was inside.

Over the shop there was a single apartment, which the sergeant used as a bedroom. Behind it were two or three rooms, used as storehouses or lumber-rooms.

A better position for "holding the fort" could hardly have been devised, for the walls of the old building were thick, of solid stone, the doors of ancient, heavy oak, and the windows extremely small, and defended by strong oak shutters.

Once safely ensconced inside, the rebels would certainly be very difficult to get at—indeed, some of the bolder rebels were of the opinion that they could hold out for ever, which would certainly create a record in sieges.

"When he comes to the window," said Raby humorously, "we can all stare at him, and he can walk down the stairs. Is that what you mean?"

"This isn't the time to make rotten jokes, Raby," said Silver sternly. "Get into cover, you chaps! We're wasting time—all through Raby!"

"Oh, all right!"

The juniors cleared out of sight. Then Jimmy Silver picked up a handful of pebbles. A clink sounded through the darkness as he threw one at the back window of Sergeant Kettle's room.

The pebble dropped to the ground with another clink.

Clink, clink, clink!

Pebble after pebble clinked on the window above. The fifth missile cracked the pane. Jimmy Silver had no doubt that the sergeant would wake up sooner or later, and he was right.

The old tower was at a safe distance from the School House, and there was no danger of the sounds being heard there.

After about five minutes' bombardment of the window a sound was heard from within. The window was thrown up, and the red face of Sergeant Kettle looked out.

"My heye!" said the old soldier. "Wot is it? My heye! Hallo!" He stared down at Jimmy Silver, the only member of the army visible to his eyes.

"Hallo, sergeant!" said Silver.

"Wot are you doing outer bed at this 'ere

time of night?" demanded the sergeant in angry astonishment.

"Waking you up, sergeant!"

"Wot do you want to wake me up for, you impudent young rip?" roared the sergeant.

"You sleep too much!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Why, you—you—you—" stuttered the wrathful sergeant. "You cut back to bed, Master Silver, and I'll report you to Mr. Manders in the mornin'!"

"I say, sergeant—"

Slam! The window closed, and the old gentleman snorted back to bed. Clink, clink, clink, clink! The pebbles rattled like hailstones on the window.

Up went the sash again, and the sergeant glared down upon the cheerful junior in blazing wrath.

"Do you want me to come down to you?" he shouted.

"Certainly!"

"Wot!"

"I say, sergeant, is it true that you were captured by the Boers, because you couldn't keep awake on duty?" asked Jimmy Silver innocently.

"Which I never was captured by the Boers, and well you know it!" roared Sergeant Kettle.

"Did you run away, sergeant?"

"R-r-run away!" spluttered the sergeant. "You wait a minute, you young villain! You wait till I come down!"

The sergeant disappeared from the window. Jimmy Silver chuckled softly. He had succeeded in waking the old sergeant with a vengeance. From the open window came the sound of the sergeant's snorts as he hurriedly dressed himself.

The extraordinary cheek of a junior waking him at half-past one in the morning, to ask him whether he had run away from the Boers, naturally made the old soldier wrathful.

In a few minutes his heavy steps could be heard on the stairs within, and there was a sound of bolts and chains being withdrawn.

"Wait till I whistle, you fellows!" whispered Jimmy Silver.

"Right-ho!"

The door opened, and the angry sergeant came out. Jimmy Silver backed away.

"You young raskil!" snorted Sergeant Kettle. "I'll march you back to the 'ouse by the scruff of your neck, and report you, that's what I'll do!"

"Bow-wow!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Come 'ere!"

"Rats!"

The sergeant made a rush at the junior. Jimmy Silver dodged promptly, and emitted at the same moment a shrill whistle.

There was a rush of feet, and a swarm of juniors closed in on the astounded sergeant.

Before he knew what was happening, a dozen pairs of hands seized him on all sides, and he was bumped on the ground.

"Got him!"

"Sit on him!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yow! Lemme go! Gerroff! Wot the thunder—" gasped the astonished sergeant.

"Ave you all gone dotty! Leggo, I say! I'll report yer!"

"Bring him in!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Elp!" roared the sergeant. "Elp! Ow! Gerr-r-o-oogh!"

A hand was clapped over the sergeant's mouth. In the grasp of the whole crowd, he was rushed back into the tower.

He collapsed on the floor, with three or four juniors sitting on him to secure him, and Jimmy Silver promptly closed the door, and locked it.

"All serette!" said Silver.

"And a giddy prisoner of war to start with!" grinned Lovell.

"Hurrah for us!"

"Lemme go! If you don't gerroff— Let go, I say! I—I—I—"

The sergeant was a powerful man, but he struggled vainly under so many assailants. He simply hadn't a chance.

"It's all right, sergeant," said Jimmy Silver soothingly. "We're not going to hurt you!"

"Urt me!" mumbled Sergeant Kettle.

"Urt me! Why, you young raskil—"

"You see, it's a barring-out, and we want this place," said Jimmy Silver.

"My heye!"

"You're a prisoner of war, but if you give your parole, we'll set you free—"

"Young raskils—"

"Will you give your parole?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Grooh! No, I won't! I'll report yer! I'll go and call Mr. Manders at once, and report yer!" howled the angry sergeant.

"That settles it! Tie him up!"

"You tie me up! Why, I—I—"

Words failed the sergeant. He struggled furiously, and the grinning juniors had to exert themselves to hold him down.

"There's plenty of cord in the shop!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver hurried into the shop and struck a match. He quickly found a coil of cord, and rejoined his chums. The sergeant was still struggling, though Lovell was sitting on his head to keep him quiet.

Jimmy Silver passed the cord round the sergeant's wrists, which were dragged together, and tied it. Then the old gentleman's ankles were secured.

Then the panting juniors released him, and the sergeant lay on the floor, gasping and blinking in speechless indignation. But he opened his mouth very soon, and yelled for help. Only one yell escaped him—then a handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth, and he gurgled into silence.

"Awfully sorry, old chap!" said Jimmy affably. "Can't be helped, you know, in war time. We're at war, you know, and in war time you civilians have to suffer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sergeant Kettle looked as if he would have a fit of apoplexy. To be tied hand and foot was an outrage, certainly; but to be called a civilian—that was the last straw!

"But as you're a non-combatant, we're going to spare your life," said Silver. "We can't spare your grub; that's commandeered, by order. But we're going to spare your life, which is more than the Prussians would do. Now, take it calmly, and look happy!"

The sergeant did not take it calmly, and did not look happy. But he was secure, and the juniors left him wriggling in his bonds.

The door was opened again, and Jimmy Silver & Co. fetched in the bundles of bedclothes. There was no sound from the direction of the school—the cries of the sergeant had not reached the sleepers there.

The rebels of Rookwood were in possession of their fortress now, and they had plenty of time to prepare for the siege—which was certain to commence in the morning.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. In Garrison.

"THESE tarts are jolly good!"

"So's this ginger-pop!"

"And these cream puffs!"

"Yes, rather!"

The Fistical Four had made a tour of the old tower, looking to the defences. When they came back to the ground floor, they found the rest of the army in the tuckshop.

A candle was burning, and the juniors were sampling the stock.

It was a new and very agreeable experience to have the run of the tuckshop without paying anything. The rebels were making the most of it.

"Chuck that!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver wrathfully. "You guzzling bounders! We didn't come here to gorge!"

"Oh, rot!" said Hooker. "We've commandeered the supplies, haven't we?"

"Jolly good tarts," said Jones minor.

"Have some, Silver, and don't jaw!"

"Look here—"

"Ginger-pop this way!"

"Doughnuts for me!"

The Fistical Four glared at the mutineers. Rebelling against Mr. Manders was all very well, but rebelling against their noble selves was quite another matter. The great leaders of the Fourth were not to be defied in this way.

Discipline had to be maintained, and the supplies of grub had to be taken care of. Jimmy Silver picked up a syphon of soda-water.

"Enough of that!" he said. "Hands off that grub!"

"Rats!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Sizzzz! Squish! Jimmy Silver turned the syphon on the mutineers. There was a chorus of enraged yells.

And the mutineers were driven out of the tuckshop into the back-parlour, most of them drenched with soda-water.

"Now you chuck it!" said Jimmy Silver sternly. "All you chaps have got to do is to obey orders!"

"Yah!"

"And if you don't like it, any four of you can get up on your hind legs and object—four at a time," said Lovell.

But no one seemed to be over-keen to take on the heroes of the Fourth.

"The best thing you can do is to go to sleep," said Newcome. "We shall be busy to-morrow."

"Well, there's something in that," agreed Jones minor. "Where are we going to sleep?"

"On the floor, of course. You've got plenty of bedclothes, thanks to having a leader who thinks of something other than guzzling jam-tarts!"

"Oh, bow-wow!"

But the juniors were very sleepy when they came to think of it, and they were soon camping out in various parts of the premises.

The Fistical Four made a final round of the fortifications, so to speak, to make sure that all was secure. Doors were locked and bolted, and the window-shutters were fastened.

Sergeant Kettle was accommodated with an armchair and a rug to make him comfortable for the night.

Then all danger of surprise being obviated, the Fistical Four rolled themselves in their blankets, to snatch an hour or two of sleep before dawn.

By three o'clock the only person awake was Sergeant Kettle, and even that old warrior nodded off at last.

And silence and slumber reigned in the old fortress at Rookwood.

But what was to happen on "he morrow? Would they be able to hold out?"

The rebels had the first laugh. If things went on as smoothly as they had begun, it looked as if they would laugh last, and, according to the proverb, best. Would they, though? It was a moot point.

THE END.

BARRED OUT!

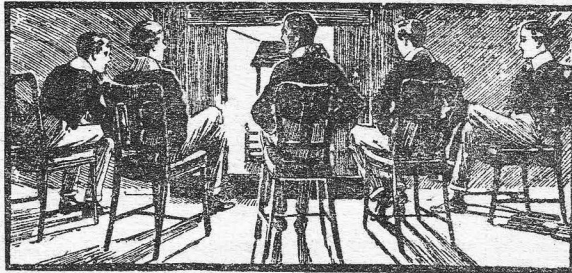
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the Chums of
St. Jim's.



By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Figgins Wants to Go.

FIGGINS dashed up the stairs of the New House at St. Jim's, and burst into the study he shared with Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"I say, you chaps!" he ejaculated.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Kerr, looking up from a book.

"I've just heard some news!" said Figgins breathlessly.

"What, a hamper come for somebody?" asked Fatty Wynn. "That's spiffing! We haven't raided the School House bouncers for days, and—"

Figgins glared at the Falstaff of the New House.

"You fathead!" he exclaimed. "You can't think of anything else except grub! You live for grub!"

"Well, I'd like to see the chap who lives without grub!" growled Fatty Wynn. "Even those professional fasting chaps have to feed sometimes. My hat! What a life!" he added, with a shiver.

"Horrible!" grinned Kerr.

"Are you going to listen to me?" roared Figgins.

"I'm all ears," murmured Kerr.

"Well, you needn't tell us that," said Figgins. "We can see it for ourselves."

"Look here—"

"Oh, dry up! Cousin Ethel's coming this afternoon!"

"Cousin Ethel!"

"Oh, good!"

Fatty Wynn and Kerr were interested at once. Nearly all the juniors at St. Jim's liked D'Arcy's cousin very much, and were always pleased when she paid a visit to the old school.

"She's coming by the three-thirty train," went on Figgins quickly. "I've just heard it from Lumley-Lumley. It's like the cheek of those Study No. 6 rotters not to tell us!"

"Unheard of!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Blake & Co. are going down to meet her," said the long-legged chief. "I vote we buzz up to the dormitory and get changed. We can go down to the village, and arrive at the station the same time as Blake & Co."

"Good egg!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm in funds just now, and if we go a little early we can stop at the tuckshop."

"Oh, blow the tuckshop!"

"Come on!" said Figgins briskly.

The Co. followed him out of the study, and presently they were hastening into their Sunday clothes. On such an occasion as this it would have been bad form to wear everyday clothes; best Etons and toppers were essential. At last they had finished, and Figgins & Co. certainly were resplendent.

"Ready?" asked Kerr.

"Yes."

"All serene, then!"

They descended to the hall, and Figgins glanced at his watch. The time was just three o'clock, so they would be able to walk to the station comfortably. They emerged into the quadrangle with a certain amount of swagger.

"I wonder if those bouncers have gone yet?" remarked Kerr.

"It's hardly time— By Jove, here they are!" said Figgins, glancing across at the School House steps. "Let's meet them at the gate, and walk down to the station with 'em."

"They might object," suggested Fatty Wynn doubtfully.

"Rats!"

"I don't want my Sunday topper bashed in."

"Don't be an ass!" said Figgins calmly. "Do you think they are going to have a scrap with us in those togs? We're as safe as eggs!"

"Oh, all right!"

And Figgins & Co. sauntered across the quad to the gates. Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three met them just as they were passing out into Rylcombe Lane.

The School House juniors were as neatly dressed as Figgins & Co.—Arthur Augustus, indeed, was a very model of gorgeousness.

From the crown of his glittering topper to the toes of his patent-leather boots he was resplendent.

"Hallo! What are you chaps doing?" asked Blake suspiciously.

"Oh, just going for a stroll!" said Figgins carelessly.

"You're togged up like new pins!" said Monty Lowther. "Do you usually go for strolls disguised as tailors' dummies? What's the game? It's not Sunday!"

"Who said it was Sunday?" growled Fatty Wynn.

"Nobody; but—"

"Oh, blow!" ejaculated Figgins. "You're blessed inquisitive! If you particularly want to know, we're going to meet somebody at the station!"

"Bai Jove, Figgay, is that weally twue?"

"Honour bright!"

"How vevy wemarkable!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "We're goin' to meet somebody at the station, too!"

"Wonderful!" said Kerr.

Tom Merry eyed the New House juniors suspiciously.

"Who're you going to meet?" he inquired.

"Oh, a friend of ours!" said Figgins carelessly.

"Look here, you New House wasters," said Manners, with some warmth, "I believe I know what you're up to! You've heard that cousin Ethel is coming, and are going to the station to meet her!"

"Bai Jove!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Manners' Unaccountable Act.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY jammed his famous monocle into his eye, and surveyed Figgins & Co. with considerable wrath.

"Is that twue, Figgay?" he asked severely.

"Are you weally goin' to the station to meet cousin Ethel?"

Figgins & Co. grinned.

"You've guessed first go!" said the New House chief.

"You bouncer!" exclaimed Blake wrathfully. "We didn't invite any New House rotters to go with us!"

"Well, we're going uninvited, my son!"

"Weally, Figgay, I fail to see why you should intwude!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "Aftah all, you would have seen cousin Ethel when she awivved heah!"

"That wasn't good enough, Gussy," said Figgins blandly. "We're going to meet her, and escort her to St. Jim's."

"And how about us?" demanded Tom Merry warmly.

"Oh, you can come with us, if you like!" said Kerr, with an air of condescension. The School House juniors gasped.

"Go with you!" ejaculated Blake. "My hat! Who the dickens do you think you are?"

"We're too modest to say!" grinned Kerr.

"If you follow us, you rotters," exclaimed Herries, "you'll jolly well get bumped!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins looked at his watch.

"It's ten past three," he said calmly. "If we waste much more time, cousin Ethel won't have anybody to meet her at all!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"My hat!"

"So I vote we all go down together," went on Figgins. "If you try to prevent us going with you, it'll only mean delay—and rumpled clothes."

"Good gwacious!" ejaculated D'Arcy, horrified.

The School House juniors looked at one another.

"Well, Gussy," said Blake, "are they to come?"

"Weally, deah boy, there is nothin' else for it," said Arthur Augustus. "Figgins & Co. are quite welcome to accompany us, but I would have pferferred them to ask my permish before toggin' themselves up!"

"We hadn't time to ask permish!" grinned Figgins.

"Come on, then, you boundahs!"

And the juniors made their way to Rylcombe without further delay. School House and New House were invariably waging war against one another, but on an occasion such as this hostilities were allowed to slumber.

They arrived at the station, and made inquiries.

"It's all wight, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "The twain will not come in for another three minutes. Undah the cires, we needn't have hurwied quite so much. I feel quite dustay, you know."

"We'll dust you if you like, Gussy," said Figgins politely.

"Don't you dare to lay your wotten hands on me, you boundahs!" said Arthur Augustus.

"The twain will be heah pwesently, and—"

"There goes the signal!" interrupted Digby. "She's left Wayland!"

"Good!"

The juniors waited impatiently for the train to arrive, collected in a group on the sunlit platform. At last a whistle in the distance told of the train's near proximity, and a moment later it steamed into the station and jerked to a standstill.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy surveyed the carriages anxiously.

"Can you see her, deah boys?" he asked.

"No, I'm blessed if I can!" exclaimed Blake.

"It's very queah— Bai Jove, theah she is, talkin' to that boundah Figgins!"

"Like his cheek!" growled Blake.

The juniors hurried up the platform, where Figgins & Co. had already formed a little circle round cousin Ethel. In a moment she was surrounded, and her rosy cheeks flushed with pleasure at the warmth of the juniors' welcome.

"Jollay glad to see you again, deah boy—I mean, gal!" exclaimed D'Arcy, removing his hat gracefully, and bowing. "It's weally a wippin' treat to have you down heah for a visit!"

"Rather!" agreed Figgins heartily.

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"It's nice of you to think so," she said; "and I certainly didn't expect to have such an escort. But hadn't we better get off the platform, Arthur?"

"Bai Jove, yaas, deah gal! Pway follow me!"

Arthur Augustus gracefully led the way out of the station. Out in the road he

turned, and was somewhat taken aback to find cousin Ethel and her escort some distance behind. Apparently D'Arcy's existence had been overlooked.

The swell of the School House bristled with indignation. After all, Ethel was his cousin, and he had the most right to be by her side. At the present moment Figgins was on her right, and Manners on her left, both of them engaged in animated conversation.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy indignantly. "The cheeky wottahs!"

He waited until his chums came up, and they could not help noticing the severe glances which he directed towards Figgins.

"What's the matter, Gussy?" inquired Kerr.

"I considah that it is uttably wewehensible of Figgins to push himself forward!" replied D'Arcy severely. "It is my place to be by cousin Ethel's side!"

"But you can't be both sides at once!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Pway, don't be widic., Lowthah! Mannahs is perfectly welcome to wetaim his posish, but I weally must insist upon Figgins wetaiahing in my favah!"

"Oh, rats!" said Fatty Wynn.

But D'Arcy took no notice of the fat junior's remarks. He pushed his way through his chums, and tugged at Figgins's sleeve, anxious that cousin Ethel should not observe the action. Figgins looked round, and then grinned.

"Hallo, Gussy!" he said genially. "I thought you were lost!"

"Pway come heah a moment, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I twust you will excuse him, Ethel?" he added, as the girl looked round.

"Certainly," said cousin Ethel readily.

Figgins frowned, but there was no help for it. He left cousin Ethel's side, and dropped behind with D'Arcy. The New House chief eyed Arthur Augustus with a certain amount of wrath.

"Now, you frabious chump, what's the matter?" he demanded.

"A gweat deal is the mattah," replied D'Arcy. "I considah that, as a New House boundah, you are takin' a wotten liberty in walkin' by cousin Ethel's side! As a wela-tive, it is my dutay—"

"Your duty, be jiggered, Gussy!" said Figgins warmly. "Blessed if I understand the reason for all this beastly formality! Surely you don't mind my escorting cousin Ethel to St. Jim's! I'm surprised at you, Gussy! You're as bad as an old grandmother!"

"Did you wufer to me as a gwandmothah?" exclaimed D'Arcy excitedly.

"I did!"

"Then, unless you wetwact that wemark —"

"For goodness' sake, Gussy, don't start a row now! Cousin Ethel's looked round twice already, and she can see you're making a fuss over nothing!"

"A fuss ovah nothin'!" repeated Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I considah it is above a joke when I am wuferred to as an old gwandmothah! I do not mean to imply any diswepct to gwandmothahs in general, but it is hardly a cowwect expression to use in connection with myself!"

"Blowed if you're not worse than a gramophone!" groaned Figgins.

Manners, some distance ahead, glanced round.

"Gussy seems to be getting excited," he remarked.

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"What is it all about?" she asked demurely. "Surely there isn't a wrangle about me? I hope Arthur isn't upsetting your friends?"

"Oh, he'll be all right in a minute!" said Manners easily. "It's only Gussy's little way, you know. He breaks out like this now and again."

"I'm sorry there's a disagreement," said cousin Ethel.

Manners looked round again. The rest of the juniors were now over a hundred yards behind, and by D'Arcy's frantic movements it was obvious that the disagreement was by no means at an end. But Manners didn't mind. Cousin Ethel's company was far from distasteful to him, and he chuckled to himself.

They strolled down the road quietly, walking slowly, in order not to get too far ahead. This part of the village was very quiet, the road on either side being bordered by little cottages, with neat front gardens.

"Everything looks beautifully fresh," cousin Ethel remarked. "Oh, see those flowers over there; aren't they lovely? I —"

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 2.

She paused, and looked about her in some surprise. Suddenly a series of shouts had made themselves audible, and apparently they proceeded from a small lane which joined the road a few yards further on.

"What the dickens is that?" said Manners, in a puzzled voice.

"I—I don't know," replied cousin Ethel wonderingly.

They hurried on a few steps, and the shouts became more frantic. Manners took a glance behind, but saw that his chums were still standing in a group in their original position.

The next moment he and cousin Ethel were opposite the lane, and they looked down it with expectant curiosity.

"My—my hat!" gasped Manners.

"Oh!" exclaimed cousin Ethel simply.

But she went a shade paler. For the sight she and Manners looked upon was sufficient to give them a considerable start.

Not two hundred yards from them, and approaching at a furious gallop, was a bull, its jaws foaming, and its tail swishing with mad rage.

The infuriated animal's hoofs beat on the hard road, and its eyes glittered evilly as it saw the two forms ahead.

For a second it appeared to pause; then, with a mad bellow, it lowered its head, and charged for cousin Ethel and Manners.

"Oh," gasped the girl pantingly, "it's coming for us!"

There was not a moment to lose—the bull would be upon them in less than thirty seconds, and its cruel horns would create deadly havoc.

Cousin Ethel stood staring before her irresolutely. Then she turned quickly to Manners, expecting him to catch hold of her and whisk her out of the way.

But Manners was staring at the hedge, apparently, taking no notice of his fair companion whatever. The next moment, with a cry, he turned from cousin Ethel, and dived head-first into the hedge.

The bull, bellowing angrily, was less than twenty-five yards distant.

Cousin Ethel gasped with surprise. Even in that moment of deadly peril she realised that Manners' nerve had given way, and that he had deserted her in order to save his own skin. At least, cousin Ethel imagined this to be the case.

But the girl had plenty of pluck, and she did not lose her head. She had seen a low shed near by, at the bottom of a strip of grassland, which was divided from the road by a low fence.

In the nick of time cousin Ethel ran to the fence, the bull snorting and puffing not eight yards behind. The girl vaulted the fence with wonderful agility, and rushed to the shed, her wealth of hair streaming behind her in the breeze.

The next moment she had wrenched open the door, and was safe.

The bull, meanwhile, had paused, bellowing and foaming, at the fence. Then, seeing the group of startled juniors in the roadway—Tom Merry & Co. had had no time to seek shelter—the animal wisely decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and wheeled round.

Then it thundered down the village street, accompanied by a chorus of shouts from a bevy of farm-labourers who appeared at the opening of the little lane. They all carried pitchforks, and lumbered breathlessly after their dangerous charge.

Tom Merry & Co. and the three New House juniors had witnessed the whole of the little episode, and now that the danger was past they rushed down the road, and hastened to the shed in which cousin Ethel had taken refuge.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Branded a Coward.

Cousin Ethel opened the door of the shed just as the juniors raced up. She was looking a little pale, and uttered a sigh of relief as she saw that the bull was now almost out of sight.

"Are you all right, Miss Cleveland?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Where's that bounder Manners?"

"Yes, where's Manners?"

"Why did he hook it?"

Cousin Ethel looked grave.

"I—I really don't know," she answered.

"I do!" said Figgins hotly. "Manners lost his nerve, and left you in the lurch! Just think of it, chaps! Leaving cousin Ethel to face the bull alone!"

"Shame!"

"Cowardly!"

"Fancy old Manners funking it!"

"If it had been one of us with him it wouldn't have mattered," went on Figgins.

"But to leave cousin Ethel by herself was—was nothing less than criminal! The rotter ought to be scalped!"

"You're in a beastly hurry, Figgins," said Tom Merry. "Why can't you wait until Manners explains? He may be able to —"

"Heah he comes, deah boys," interrupted D'Arcy suddenly. "in all pwobability he will be able to ofiah a perfectly satisfactory explanation. It was uttably unlike Mannahs to show the white feathah!"

"I'm blessed if I can understand it," said Monty Lowther bluntly.

"Please wait a moment," said cousin Ethel. "I am sure Manners will be able to explain.

The bull has gone now, and there is no danger. I am quite myself again now, Arthur."

"That's wight, deah gal!"

Manners came up to the group of juniors surrounding cousin Ethel, with a doubtful expression upon his face. His chums misinterpreted that look; in reality, Manners was only wondering how he would be received, but the juniors imagined him to be thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"That was a jolly near escape for cousin Ethel," he remarked. "As it happened, I shouldn't have done any good if I'd stayed by her side—"

"That's no excuse!" exclaimed Figgins hotly. "Look here, Manners; we want to know why you ran away—why you left cousin Ethel and dived into the hedge?"

Manners hesitated, and his chums had no further doubts.

"Well, I—I—I'm hanged if I can explain in a few words!" he said. "If things had turned out as I expected you'd have known the reason before now. But —"

Blake stepped forward.

"Why the dickens can't you speak out plain?" he demanded. "Why can't you own the truth?"

"The truth?" Manners repeated. "What do you mean?"

"You funked it!" exclaimed Figgins. "You lost your rotten nerve, and scooted, leaving cousin Ethel to look after herself!"

"It was disgraceful!" said Blake. "To leave a girl in a position like that was the act of a beastly coward!"

"Heah, heah!"

"I'm absolutely ashamed of you, Manners," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Manners stepped back, and all the colour fled from his cheeks. A look of astonishment was on his face as he surveyed the scornful and accusing countenances round him.

"You—you don't think I funked it!" he gasped. "You don't think I deliberately left cousin Ethel because I was afraid?"

"There's no other explanation," said Figgins.

"Do you think I left you because I turned coward?" asked Manners eagerly, turning to cousin Ethel.

"I—I hardly know what to say," replied the girl. "Your action was very unaccountable."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Manners looked round him excitedly.

"Surely you don't condemn me before I've had a chance to explain?" he exclaimed.

"I've never acted cowardly since I've been at St. Jim's, and you all know it. I may not be an extra plucky chap, but nobody's ever called me a funk!"

Tom Merry looked uncomfortable.

"If we've misjudged you, Manners, we'll apologise, of course," he said quietly. "But I'm blessed if I can see where your explanation is coming in. The action was so obvious, on the face of it. Directly you saw the bull rushing at you, you left cousin Ethel, and dived into the hedge."

"There's no explanation to that!" declared Figgins. "It explains itself!"

"I suppose it does, on the face of it," said Manners angrily. "But can't you wait a minute? Great Scott, I never imagined I should get a reception like this! I'll tell you the whole truth, and if you don't believe it you can jolly well do the other thing!"

"Oh, don't quarrel, please!" pleaded cousin Ethel.

"I don't want to quarrel," replied Manners.

"But when a chap's called a funk he doesn't feel in a very good temper. I left cousin Ethel's side because I saw that a little child was in great danger of being killed! I knew that cousin Ethel could, at least, run for it, but the child was absolutely helpless. There wasn't any time to talk, so I simply acted."

"And did you save the child?" asked Tom Merry incredulously.

"No," replied Manners. "When I got to the spot I found that the child wasn't there. It had been saved by its mother."

For a moment there was absolute silence. The juniors looked at one another uncomfortably. Manners' explanation sounded so obviously untrue, so utterly preposterous, that the juniors had some excuse for being incredulous.

"You say you went to save a child," repeated Monty Lowther. "Where was it—in the hedge? Did you think the bull would suddenly charge at the hedge?"

"No, I didn't," replied Manners, turning crimson. "The child was just rushing towards the open gate of a cottage, and I thought that if I dived into the hedge I could reach it more quickly. If the child hadn't been stopped, it would have run out right under the feet of the bull."

"So, instead of running to the garden, you dived into the hedge?" asked Figgins sarcastically. "Look here, Manners, that yarn's a bit fishy! You've got nothing to support it. You say that when you got there the child was gone. There's nothing to prove that it was ever there!"

"There's my word!" flashed back Blake. "We didn't see any child," said Blake, ignoring Manners' remark. "We saw the whole incident, but there was no child there."

"I tell you it was just in a garden!" repeated Manners.

"Well, cousin Ethel was with you," said Tom Merry. "If you saw it, she must have seen it, being in the same place. Did you notice a child, Miss Cleveland?"

"I—I really can't say," replied cousin Ethel, looking at Manners uncomfortably, and with a certain amount of coldness. "I was too frightened to notice anything, I think."

"You can't remember seeing the child at all?" asked Figgins.

"I didn't see anything, except the bull."

"Then there's not much doubt in my mind," said the long-legged junior grimly. "I've always had a great respect for Manners, but after this I'm blessed if I know what to do! He's a coward and a rotter! Even when there's no excuse he gets up a fibbing tale to exonerate himself from blame!"

Manners clenched his teeth.

"You say I'm a coward!" he shouted angrily. "My hat, if cousin Ethel wasn't here I'd knock you down, Figgins! And I'll fight any other chap who says the same thing! You haven't let me explain properly; you haven't let me go into details! I always thought you were my chums, but I see now I was mistaken!"

"Oh, please calm yourself, Manners!" interrupted cousin Ethel painfully.

"Do you think I've been lying, Miss Cleveland?" asked Manners hotly.

"I shall say nothing until there is proof," replied the girl.

"There you are!" exclaimed Manners. "There's an example for you, you rotters! You've condemned me at once, but cousin Ethel's going to wait until there's proof! What do you think of yourselves? Do you call yourselves my chums?"

Tom Merry and Lowther looked uncomfortable, while the rest of the juniors were certainly impressed by Manners' outburst.

"Don't be so jolly snappy!" said Tom Merry at last. "If what you say is true, Manners, we shall look like a set of rotters, and shall have to apologise. But, as matters now stand, it looks very much as if you've been telling whoppers in order to excuse yourself. We don't blame you so much for showing the white feather—"

"Don't we!" growled Figgins. "But when you tell whoppers on the top of it—"

"I didn't show the white feather!" roared Manners.

"You did!" said Fatty Wynn warmly.

"I didn't!"

"I say you did—"

"Oh, please—please, don't quarrel!" entreated cousin Ethel. "There's a way to settle the matter once and for all."

"How can it be settled?" asked Tom Merry.

"By going to the cottage Manners speaks of, and asking if a child was about to cross the road when the bull passed, and if anybody snatched it away in the nick of time."

"Bai Jove, that's a wipin' suggestion!" exclaimed D'Arcy enthusiastically. "It will clear up everything stwaightaway. Have you anythin' to say about the ideah, Mannahs?"

Manners' face lightened for a moment, and then a troubled frown crossed his brow. He hesitated before replying, and that hesita-

tion practically condemned him in the eyes of the juniors. If his story was false it would, of course, be useless going to the cottage.

"Well?" asked Monty Lowther shortly. "It—it seems a good idea," said Manners, looking round. "But I'm blessed if I know exactly which cottage it was! They're all very much alike, you know, and in the excitement of the moment I didn't pay any attention at all to the houses. I simply saw the child, and made up my mind to save it."

Manners paused as he saw the black looks on the faces around him.

Then he realised how his chums would regard this explanation.

To them it would seem almost impossible that he could not know the cottage. Yet it was an absolute fact.

"Don't talk piffle!" exclaimed Figgins roughly. "Do you mean to stuff us that you can't point out which garden the child was in? Why, there are only eight cottages altogether on that side of the road! It's pretty plain, chaps, that Manners has been fibbing all along!"

"It's nothing of the sort!" retorted Manners angrily. "If you've got any sense you'd realise that what I say is true! How could I take notice of the cottage at such a time? All I know is that it's one of those two with the whitewashed fronts, though which one it was I couldn't say!"

Manners pointed across to two cottages, semi-detached, which were quite distinct from the others, inasmuch as their front walls had been lately white-washed.

"Why the dickens couldn't you say so before?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If it's one of those two we can jolly soon find out the truth. I vote cousin Ethel, myself, and Manners go over there and make inquiries; we can't all troop into the garden."

"Good egg!" said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, it will be the best way," said Ethel quietly. "I hate having to take a part in this affair at all; but in fairness to Manners we must see if the facts were as he has stated. If he has told the truth all along we shall look very ridiculous, and deserve to be for having doubted his word."

Cousin Ethel, with a very worried frown upon her pretty face, stepped forward, and Tom Merry and Manners accompanied her. The rest of the juniors gathered in a little group, eagerly discussing the matter.

Ethel and the two juniors arrived in the roadway, and looked at the two cottages. Manners' glance was eager, and Tom Merry's doubtful. He hated having to doubt his chum, but his story seemed to be a palpable "fairy tale."

"One of the cottages is empty!" exclaimed cousin Ethel, pointing to a large "To Let" placard which hung in the window of the front upper room. A glance served to show that the cottage was indeed empty—or apparently so—for it was curtainless, and wore an air of neglect.

"By Jove, that's good!" said Tom Merry. "As this cottage is empty we shall only have to inquire next door. You are quite sure the child was in one of these gardens, Manners?"

"Positive!" said Manners, looking into the gardens. "And it seems to me that it was in the empty one. But, of course, I may be mistaken."

"You may not be," said Ethel. "The child could have wandered into it from next door, as the only division is a low hedge, with several big gaps in it. But come, we will go and inquire."

"I'll stop here," said Manners.

"Right-ho!" replied Tom Merry. "And I hope to goodness it turns out all right. It's a beastly business altogether, and I hate having to verify your word. The other chaps won't be satisfied until we've inquired."

Manners watched eagerly as cousin Ethel and Tom Merry knocked at the cottage door.

As he looked at cousin Ethel and Tom Merry his spirits rose. The little child—a baby girl—had certainly been in one of these two gardens, and as one of the cottages was empty it was a foregone conclusion that she lived in the one that was tenanted.

"It'll be all serene," thought Manners. "Cousin Ethel'll soon find out the truth, and the chaps will be sorry they suspected me of finking and lying. I don't blame 'em for—"

Manners paused, and a keen, concentrated look entered his eyes. He was watching an old man who had answered Tom Merry's knock. The old man was impatiently shak-

ing his head, and cycling his visitors with obvious displeasure.

Manners caught his breath in, and a cold hand seemed to clutch his heart.

Why was the old fellow shaking his head. What could it mean?

Cousin Ethel and Tom Merry turned away from the door, and the latter slammed to. Involuntarily Manners stepped forward and met the pair as they approached him. "Well?" he asked eagerly. "I spoke the truth, didn't I?"

Tom Merry looked at his chum curiously, and a certain hard glitter shone in his usually merry eyes. Cousin Ethel, too, seemed grave and cold, and refrained from looking at Manners at all.

"What's the matter?" asked Manners sharply. "What's up, Tom?"

Tom Merry's lip curled. "We've proved you to be a liar, that's all," he said quietly. "The only person who lives in this cottage is a bad-tempered old man, and there hasn't been a child in it for years! You're a liar and a coward, Manners!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Condemned by All.

MANNERS staggered back. "Good heavens!" he muttered hoarsely. "You—you don't mean it, Tom? It can't be true! I saw the child myself! I tried to save it from the bull!"

Tom Merry uttered an impatient exclamation.

"What's the good of keeping up that rotten yarn?" he exclaimed angrily. "I'm hanged if I can understand you, Manners! You must have known all along that you'd be found out."

Manners seemed dazed.

Tom Merry walked across the road, with cousin Ethel, looking very grave and serious, by his side.

Blake & Co. and the New House trio were standing in a grim little group, and Tom Merry explained in a few words. Brows became frowning and hostile, and Manners found himself surrounded by his angry companions.

"You rotter!" said Figgins hotly. "I knew all along that yarn was a fairy-tale. You deserve to be drummed out of St. Jim's! I always thought Mellish and Levison were about the limit in cadishness, but I'm hanged if you don't beat 'em hollow!"

"Bai Jove, that's wathah stiff, Figgins!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I hardly think Mannahs is as bad as Levison. Levison is a wotthah to the coah, but Mannahs has always been a decent chap up till now."

Manners nearly choked.

"You're all mistaken!" he declared passionately. "I didn't funk it—I haven't lied! You're all mistaken, I tell you! Don't you know me well enough to know that I wouldn't try to shield myself by inventing a string of palpable lies? Everything happened as I have said—everything!"

"Oh, weally, Mannahs, that's wathah stiff!" protested Arthur Augustus.

"I've told the truth!"

"You rotter!" shouted Blake, losing all patience. "We've got absolute proof that you've lied!"

"You haven't!" said Manners, between his teeth. "I saw the child, and tried to save it."

"There wasn't any child!"

"There was!"

"There wasn't!"

Tom Merry stamped his foot.

"Look here," he said impatiently. "Are you sure of the cottage?"

"It was either the one you went to or the empty one," replied Manners.

"Are you sure?"

"Positively certain!"

"Then you condemn yourself!" said Tom Merry coldly.

"How?"

"Because there are only two cottages where the child could have come from, and one of them is empty. The other is tenanted by a crusty old man, who says that there are no children there, and never have been."

"Which proves absolutely that Manners' tale is a big lie, invented to excuse his cowardice!" said Herries warmly. "Great Scott, I never thought Manners was such a bounder!"

"He's a rank rotter!"

"Rather!"

"I've told the truth!" shouted Manners desperately. "I've—"

"Coward!"

"Funk!"

"Liar!"

"Rotter!"

"Dry up, you uttah boundah!"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were silent. The affair seemed to have stunned them. All said and done, Manners was their bosom chum, and they hadn't it in their hearts to find voice to their indignation.

The affair was nothing serious, nothing criminal; but it seemed to prove that their chum was a liar and a funk of the first water—a state of affairs they had never dreamed of.

They could not have been harder hit had they suddenly discovered Manners to be a thief.

Cousin Ethel stood by, waiting quietly, her pretty face wearing a look of worry and concern that had no place there. She could not help realising that all this bother was directly due to her visit to St. Jim's, and she wished heartily that she had never come.

It pained her exceedingly to know that she was the cause—innocent enough, no doubt—of this serious quarrel.

"Let's be getting on," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Yes; please have done with this horrid disagreement!" said cousin Ethel eagerly.

"Disagreement!" repeated Figgins. "My only hat! I wish it was nothing worse!"

"If you'll let me explain—" began Manners.

"We won't!"

"Shut up!"

"Dry up, you cad!"

"We've heard enough lies!" snapped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You'd better not come with us, Manners," said Figgins darkly.

"I won't!" exclaimed Manners, suddenly becoming furious. "I'll walk to St. Jim's alone. Perhaps by the time you get there you'll realise that you're all a set of prize rotters to condemn me on evidence that carries absolutely no weight!"

And Manners turned on his heel and walked away, his eyes gleaming, and his chest heaving with emotion.

The juniors looked after him angrily, for his last words had served no other purpose than to blacken his character still more.

And yet the juniors were hardly to be blamed; the evidence—in their eyes—was such that they could hardly place any reliance on Manners' statement. Everything pointed to its being a falsehood.

It was not until just before tea Tom Merry met Manners again. The latter was still looking pale, and his jaw was set obstinately.

"I say, Manners!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well?" growled Manners.

"I suppose you know that it won't be any good your coming to Study No. 6 for tea?" went on the hero of the Shell, in a chilly manner. "The fellows are rather set against you just now, and—"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Manners bitterly. "You're all against me—you and Monty as well as the rest! I wouldn't have tea with you if you asked me, so you can go and eat coke!"

And Manners passed into the School House, leaving Tom Merry biting his lip.

The grand tea was not exactly a success. Manners' absence was very noticeable, and the party seemed incomplete. Monty Lowther endeavoured to liven matters with several extra-witty jokes, but they all fell somewhat flat.

Cousin Ethel, too, was in a thoughtful mood, and disinclined to talk. So the juniors were really relieved when the party broke up. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther walked into the Shell passage with gloomy faces.

"Rotten!" growled Lowther. "That ass Manners has messed up the day!"

"I expect he's in the study," said Tom Merry. "I vote we grab hold of him, and make him own up. Perhaps he'll do it when all the other kids aren't crowding round."

"It's possible," replied Lowther. "Anyhow, we'll try it on."

They entered their study, and, as Tom Merry had expected, Manners was sitting there, gazing absently out of the window into the pleasant evening sunlight. He looked round as his chums entered, then turned his head away again.

"Look here, Manners, we want to talk to you quietly," said Tom Merry, getting to business without any preamble. "We're alone now, and we want you to own up. We want to know why the dickens you ran away from that bull and left cousin Ethel to face it alone."

"It was rotten of you!" said Lowther severely.

Manners rose to his feet and closed the window. Then he walked slowly into the middle of the study and faced his chums. His face was serious, and he was now deadly calm.

"Tell me this," he said quietly. "Do you chaps really think I left cousin Ethel's side because I funked facing the bull? We've known each other a pretty long time—quite long enough, anyhow, to know the stuff we're made of. Do you honestly think I funked it, and then lied to you all afterwards?"

Tom Merry and Lowther were somewhat taken aback. They had expected a fiery outburst, and were not quite prepared for this attitude.

"I—What else can we think?" stammered Tom Merry.

"That's not an answer," said Manners grimly. "I want to know your opinion."

"Yes or no?"

"That's it. Do you think I funked it?"

"That's rather a rotten question to answer deliberately," said Tom Merry uneasily. "If we've misjudged you, Manners, we'll kick ourselves to bits. But if you want a direct answer, I'll give it to you."

"I do want a direct answer," said Manners.

"Very well," replied Tom. "I believe you lost your head for a moment, and dived into the hedge without thinking of the consequences."

"And you think the same?" asked Manners, turning to Monty Lowther.

"Yes," replied Lowther, after a moment's hesitation.

"Right!" said Manners. "It's just as well to know. But, I tell you, I'm more disappointed than I can say. I never thought that my own chums could seriously suspect me of such rotten conduct! Perhaps I'm unreasonable, but I feel it!"

Manners turned away for a moment, but his chums could plainly hear the gulp he gave utterance to. They felt extremely uneasy; but before they could speak Manners had turned again.

"It amounts to this," he went on quietly.

"You've admitted that you believe me to be a coward—a brute capable of deserting a girl for no other purpose than to protect myself. You believe me to be a liar; you think I ran away from cousin Ethel, then felt ashamed of myself, and invented a tale to explain my sudden dive into the hedge. In other words, I'm a cad too contemptible to look at—which I should be if I'd really done as you suspect! It's a wonder you're not too disgusted to speak to me at all!"

"Hang it all, Manners," exclaimed Tom Merry, "you're jolly rough on us—"

"Rough!" flashed Manners. "Haven't you admitted it? Haven't you just said that you believe all this suspicion against me? I've only stated the plain facts. If I'd really done as you think, I'd be too disgusted with myself to think of inventing an excuse."

Manners' face was flushed now, and his eyes were blazing. His chums glanced at one another uncertainly.

"Oh, hang!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You make us feel like a couple of cads, Manners! Look here, you've never really described what happened—fully, I mean. Why not tell us exactly what did occur?"

"What's the good?" asked Manners. "You've said that you believe it to be an invented tale!"

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"We can't judge properly yet," he said. "I think we've been too hasty. Tell us the whole incident fully."

"All right, I will," answered Manners. "I don't mind admitting you've got some cause to suspect me, seeing that everything seems to condemn me; but I seriously think that you oughtn't to have been so jolly ready to take matters for granted. That inquiry at the cottage seems to label me a liar!"

"We couldn't think anything else," said Tom Merry. "Can you explain why the old man said there were no children there?"

"I'm blessed if I can," replied Manners.

"I thought the inquiry would prove my innocence, but it only proved my guilt. This is what happened, and you can believe it or disbelieve it. All I know is that it's the honest truth. Cousin Ethel and I saw the bull at the same moment, and it was about two hundred yards from us. I didn't feel startled, even, but thought instantly that I should have to get Ethel out of the way without a second's loss. Then, just as I was going to grab hold of her, I saw some-

thing which caused me to alter my plan completely.

"Quite close to us was a garden, and over the top of the hedge I caught a glimpse of a little child running towards the open gate. I don't suppose Ethel saw it, as she wasn't tall enough. Anyhow, in a second it flashed through my head that the child would run out into the road, and be trampled to death by the bull, and, without hesitating a moment—for hesitation would have been fatal—I dived straight into the hedge."

"You'd think that it would have been quicker to rush along the road; but I'd seen the gap in the hedge, and knew that I could just reach the child before it got to the gate. Besides, the bull might have got me as I rushed for the gate, so it was better all round to dive through the hedge. Everything left my mind except the thought of that helpless little child. I left cousin Ethel without even realising her peril; I only wondered if I should be in time to save the child. My coat caught in a bramble just after I'd passed through the hedge, and it delayed me for a second, and I only got loose by tearing the cloth. Here's the tear."

"Well, when I'd dashed to the gate I looked round in surprise. The child wasn't to be seen anywhere, and the bull thundered past, attracting my attention. I thought of rushing out and saving Ethel; but by that time she'd skipped over the fence, and I knew she was safe. I looked round again, but couldn't even see anybody looking out of the cottage windows. The whole incident had happened in about ten seconds, and I was feeling dazed. I walked back to the gap, and then passed out into the road, realising that you chaps must have thought I'd turned a coward. It was a jolly rotten situation, and I can forgive the Fourth Form chaps for being so down on me; but I thought you two, my own chums, knew me better. I thought you'd believe in me, whatever the circumstances!"

Manners finished, and turned away again. For a moment there was silence in the study. Tom Merry and Lowther felt a lump in their throats, and realised how Manners must feel if his story was really true.

"I'm blessed if I don't believe in you, Manners, old man!" said Tom Merry at last. "Why the dickens didn't you explain the affair as fully as this before?"

"How could I?" asked Manners. "You wouldn't let me speak, and I could tell by the looks on your faces that you thought I was fibbing!"

"It sounded so jolly weak, you know," said Monty Lowther. "You didn't go into details at all, but just stated the bald facts. Besides, there was that inquiry at the cottage. If there really was a child—"

"You still doubt me, then?" asked Manners bitterly.

"No, I'm hanged if I do!" ejaculated Lowther, grasping Manners' hand. "We've been a couple of silly asses, Manners, and we ought to be ashamed of ourselves! We both believe you acted exactly as you say—don't we, Tommy?"

"Yes," replied Tom Merry quietly. "I hope you'll forgive us, old man."

Manners blew his nose violently, and hid his face in his handkerchief for a moment.

"I'll forgive you right enough, you asses," he said. "I've said some pretty rough things, but—"

"We deserved 'em all!" said Tom Merry light-heartedly. "But to return to the giddy subject. How do you account for that old jossler saying there were no children in the house?"

Manners looked thoughtful.

"I'm blessed if I can account for it," he replied. "It's a fair puzzler. Still, I'm certain the kid was in one of those two gardens—and one cottage is empty. We shall have to make inquiries—"

"I'm not going to," interrupted Lowther. "I'll take Manners' word for it. We've known him for years, and he's never told us a lie yet, so I reckon we ought to know his character. We must have been potty to suspect him of being a liar and a coward. Only five minutes ago I said I believed it of him; and if he likes to punch my nose through the back of my head, he's at liberty to do so."

Manners smiled.

"I'm not going to do that," he said. "I've been awfully wretched since we parted in the village, but now I don't care what the other chaps think. You believe in me, so it's all right."

"But I care what the other chaps think," said Tom Merry thoughtfully; "and I'm afraid they'll continue to stick to their

decision. You know, Manners, the thing looks jolly conclusive, and they won't be ready to take your bare word in face of all the evidence!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Sent to Coventry.

THE Terrible Three regarded one another for a moment in silence. Tom Merry's words were probably quite right, for the Fourth-Formers had it firmly fixed in their minds that Manners had been lying.

"If they don't believe me, they can do the other thing!" said Manners calmly. "Perhaps they'll realise, after a day or two, that they have been too jolly hasty. And I shan't make any effort to find proof!"

"I shall, then!" said Tom Merry firmly. "I'm quite ready to take your word, old man, but I'm not going to have the other chaps pointing to you, and shunning you as if you were a cad like Levison. I shall make inquiries, and find the woman who picked that child up. Until I find her, though, I'm afraid the others will be rather down on you!"

And Tom Merry was right. While the Terrible Three had been discussing the situation, a meeting had been taking place in the Common-room. Most of the School House juniors were there, and Figgins & Co. had brought over Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen, of the New House.

Blake was mounted on a form, with red face and waving arms.

"The whole thing amounts to this!" he shouted, above the hum of conversation in the Common-room. "Manners has shown the white feather in an absolutely unmistakable way; he ran away and left cousin Ethel in a position of danger. If she'd have been like most girls, she would have stood stock still, and let the bull rush at her. So it's only owing to the fact that she was a jolly plucky girl that she wasn't killed! That doesn't alter the seriousness of Manners' action a bit. He's a coward—"

"Rather!"

"A beastly coward!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And he'll have to be punished," went on Blake. "It wouldn't have been so bad if he'd owned up—"

"I suppose there's no doubt that it's true?" asked Kangaroo.

"Doubt?" repeated Blake. "You burbling duffer, how can there be doubt? Hasn't it been proved to the hilt that Manners was fibbing? Didn't Tom Merry and cousin Ethel make inquiries at the cottage?"

"Yes; but—"

"But rats!" snapped Figgins. "The facts are absolutely clear. We knew before any inquiry was made that the yarn was a lie. It was too palpable for words!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, regarding the assembly through his monocle. "As a wule, I'm the first chap to stick up for a fellah who's down, but in this case I weally considah that Manners is deservin' of utterly no sympathy. He deserted my cousin in a most bwutal way, and I shall nevah forgive him!"

"I wouldn't say that, Gussy!" exclaimed Blake. "All I say is that he ought to be punished, and made to realise that we won't stand any tommy-rot! I never suspected Manners of being a liar, but now that we know what he is, we've got to show him that we won't have any more of it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Scalp the rotter!"

"Bump him!"

"In a day or two, perhaps, he'll come to his senses and own up," went on Blake. "If he does we'll overlook the matter completely, and give him a fresh start. He's never been a liar before, and this fuss might sicken him."

"How about his punishment?" asked Clifton Dane.

"Well, I vote we send him to Coventry until he owns up!" said Blake. "Being sent to Coventry is about the most severe sentence we could hit upon, and if we all agree to it he'll find himself shunned by the whole of the Lower School."

"It's a bit thick—" began Kerr.

"Thick be blowed!" ejaculated Figgins hotly. "He deserves all he gets! I consider Blake's suggestion is a good one. If Manners is sent to Coventry until he owns up, he'll soon be sick of it, and make a clean breast of everything. He'll admit that he turned coward, and afterwards told terrific fibs. It's the only thing he can do!"

The plan seemed to meet with general approval.

"Good wheeze!" said Herries. "Send him to Coventry till he owns up!"

"That's it!"

"Couldn't think of a better punishment!"

"It's first-rate!"

"We've all got to agree, though," went on Blake. "Are we all here? Are— Hallo, who's that at the door?"

The Terrible Three entered.

There was a sudden hush, and the juniors regarded Manners curiously. Manners was looking quite cheerful, and affected not to notice the hostile looks cast in his direction.

"What's this excitement, kids?" asked Tom Merry, looking round.

"You know well enough!" growled Blake.

"I believe I do," answered Tom Merry. "You've been discussing Manners. Well, Monty Lowther and I have been questioning Manners, and we've come to a decision."

"What's that?"

"We believe that Manners has told the truth," answered the captain of the Shell quietly. "He's never acted cowardly or been a liar before, and we're jolly certain that he wouldn't become both within the space of two minutes!"

The meeting gasped.

"Do—do you mean to say that you believe in his fatheaded yarn?" asked Figgins.

already told you nothing but the honest truth. I don't suppose you'll believe me for a minute, but my statement about the little child was true, and I claim that I acted in the only way possible under the circumstances."

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

There was an angry buzz.

"You still stick to that yarn, then?" asked Figgins hotly. "You still expect us to believe it?"

"I expect you to believe the truth."

"The truth? It's a downright lie!" roared Blake. "How you can stand there and say it's the truth beats me! Tom Merry went to the cottage with cousin Ethel, and came away with positive proof that there had been no child at all! How the dickens can your yarn be true if there was no child?"

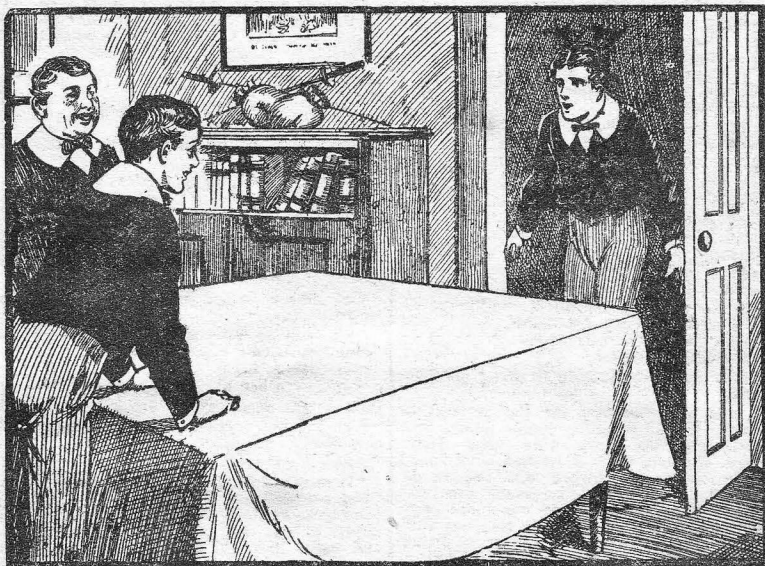
"There was a child!" replied Manners calmly.

Blake turned to Tom Merry excitedly.

"Was there a child?" he asked. "Answer that question!"

"There was no little girl in the cottage I went to—"

"And the other cottage was empty!" interrupted Blake scornfully. "My hat! I'm blest if I can understand how you two chaps can believe in the rotter, although he is



FIGGINS BRINGS NEWS!

"Yes," replied Monty Lowther warmly. "And it's not half so fatheaded as you are, let me tell you! He acted honourably, and, although there's no vestige of proof, Tom Merry and I are both willing to take his word!"

"Fat lot that's worth!" sneered Mellish of the Fourth.

"Shut up, you rotter!" said Tom Merry sharply. "The others can say what they like, but I'm not going to stand any nonsense from you!"

"Oh, let him talk!" said Manners. "I don't mind what anybody says! My conscience is quite clear, so I don't worry. Still, it's a bit rotten to know that all my chums can think so bad of me. I've never given any of you cause to suspect me of cowardice—"

"What's the good of going over it again?" shouted Figgins angrily. "I'm not surprised at Lowther and Tom Merry believing in you, because they're your bosom chums; but you won't find us so ready. Don't forget that we saw everything, and know positively well that you turned coward."

"We've always been friends, Manners," said Blake seriously. "Why not act sensibly, and make a clean breast of it? If you'll own your fault, here and now, we'll all overlook it, and give you another chance."

Manners looked round him with a firm glint in his eyes.

"What you want me to do is to own up," he said. "Well, if I owned up I should be telling a lie—for the simple reason that I've

your own chum! He's getting worse and worse, because he won't admit his guilt!"

"I tell you I've told the truth," shouted Manners, beginning to lose his temper. "I've

"Shut up, you rotter!"

"Dry up!"

"Coward!"

"Funk!"

"Bump him!"

The Common-room was in a roar of indignation. To the juniors it seemed that Manners had made matters worse by still sticking to his tale.

As it was the truth, Manners could do nothing else, but the juniors had made up their minds that it was not the truth.

They pressed forward, and Manners found himself grasped.

But Blake was on the form again.

"Let him alone, you chumps!" he roared. "Let the rotter alone! We've agreed as to his sentence, so what's the good of bumping him?"

The crowd drew back, and Manners found himself facing a score of angry, scornful faces.

"You're an idiot, Manners—a fatheaded idiot!" said Blake angrily. "If you'd owned up everything would have been all right. As it is, I'm going to tell you the punishment you've been sentenced to. From this moment onwards you're in Coventry! Not a single chump in the Fourth or Shell is going to speak to you, or take any notice of you, until you

own up. When you do that everything will go on as usual!"

"Hold on!" said Monty Lowther. "You said just now that no chap in the Shell is going to speak to Manners, didn't you?"

"Yes."
"Well, you're wrong," said Lowther, "because I'm going to! And so is Tom Merry. We believe Manners' story, and think you all a set of prize rotters!"

An angry retort was on Blake's lips, but he forced it back, and smiled.

"As you're both his special chums, we'll exclude you," he replied. "But everybody else has agreed that Manners is to be sent to Coventry until he makes a clean breast of it. It'll be rotten for him, but that's his own look-out—"

Manners strode forward, his eyes blazing. "If you think I care twopence about you all, you're mistaken!" he shouted furiously. "You're a lot of cowardly hounds, and even if you hadn't sent me to Coventry I should have cut you all! You can do what you like, but you'll have to wait until Doomsday for me to own up to something I never did!"

And Manners strode out, leaving the Common-room in an uproar.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Cousin Ethel Intervenes.

THE excitement lasted for some little time, and the juniors were only finally made quiet by the sudden appearance of a prefect, who proceeded to lay about him somewhat severely with a cane.

After that the noise subsided, and the juniors calmed down.

It was a heavy blow for Manners to bear. No doubt the juniors thought they were acting in a perfectly just manner.

They really believed that Manners was a coward, and treated him as such.

This made the blow all the harder, for Manners was as innocent of cowardice and falsehood as Tom Merry himself.

The incident had happened exactly as he had described, detail for detail, and it was cruel for him to be condemned and sentenced for absolutely nothing.

Yet he could do nothing to prove his innocence.

It was not a matter for the prefects or masters; it was a purely junior affair. But, nevertheless, the boys were more bitter against Manners than if he had been found out in theft. A coward was not to be tolerated at any price, especially one who endeavoured to excuse his cowardice with palpable falsehoods. It was in this way that the juniors looked upon the matter, and they were hardly to be blamed for their attitude.

Manners realised this perfectly, and so, when he had calmed down, he almost forgave the Fourth-Formers for their indignant hostility.

Shortly after the meeting had broken up, Blake, Figgins, and Arthur Augustus met cousin Ethel outside the Head's garden.

They noticed that the girl was looking troubled. The juniors could guess the reason for her worried look, and Figgins hastened to say something.

"Don't you worry about Manners, Miss Cleveland!" he exclaimed. "He hasn't owned up, and he deserves all he's got!"

"And what have you done?" asked Ethel quickly.

"The juniors hesitated a moment.

"He's been sent to Coventry by the Fourth and Shell," said Blake at length. "He refused to admit his guilt, so we sent him to Coventry until he owns up."

"Oh, that explains why so many of the boys were walking past Manners in such a peculiar

way," said cousin Ethel quietly. "It was rather caddish of them, wasn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah gal," replied D'Arcy. "We do not agree with the wotahs at all. Mannahs has been sent to Coventry, and they ought to have let it west at that."

"But Tom Merry and Lowther are with Manners," said Ethel. "Are they in Coventry, too?"

"Oh, no!" replied Figgins. "The silly chumps believe in Manners' yarn, and say they're going to be as chummy as ever. Of course, they're his special chums, but I reckon they're a couple of credulous asses, all the same!"

Cousin Ethel gave Figgins a severe look, which caused the New House chief to turn quite pale.

"You shouldn't say that, Figgins," said the girl quietly. "I think it is splendid of Tom Merry and Lowther to stick up for their chum!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Figgins hastily. "They're bricks, of course!"

Arthur Augustus gazed at Figgins through his monocle in surprise.

"Why, you uttah ass, you just said they were a couple of cwedulous—"

Figgins glared.

"I think they're acting splendidly!" he said firmly. "Cousin Ethel has just said so, and agree with her. I—I don't mean what I said before."

Blake chuckled; but cousin Ethel was looking very serious.

"Mustn't anybody speak to Manners, then?" she asked.

"Of course not, deah gal. He's in Coventry."

"I don't like it at all," went on the girl. "It was all my fault, to begin with—at least, it was owing to my presence. Please, couldn't you let Manners off? Couldn't you let things go on as usual? I can't bear to think of Manners being in such disgrace because of me!"

The juniors looked at their girl chum in surprise.

"Oh, weally, deah gal," protested D'Arcy. "Mannahs is only gettin' what he deserves!"

"Of course!" said Blake.

"He's only got to own up, and he's out of Coventry at once," added Figgins.

"Yes; but suppose he is innocent of cowardice?" suggested cousin Ethel.

"But it's proved—"

"It seems to be, I know," admitted the girl. "But suppose, for a moment, that he acted exactly as he said? Wouldn't it be hard and unjust to send him to Coventry—to shun him, and make him feel utterly wretched? The proof seems positive, but there is a bare chance that he was speaking the truth. Manners has always been such a truthful, honourable boy, that I can't believe he's guilty of such base behaviour."

"Neither could we at first," replied Blake; "but we were forced to at last. The evidence was all against him—his story was a hollow invention, with nothing whatever to back it up."

Cousin Ethel nodded gravely.

"Yes, it does seem like it," she agreed; "and I'm very disappointed and grieved. But I can't bear to think that I've brought this trouble on him. Can't I do anything—haven't I any say in the matter at all?"

"Of course!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then will you let me suggest something? I am more concerned than anybody, and I don't want Manners sent to Coventry," said cousin Ethel quietly. "Just for my sake, will

you let him off? I can't alter your feelings towards him, but I think it's awfully hard to send him to Coventry. Will you please let him off, and allow things to go on as usual—for my sake?"

The juniors shuffled their feet uncomfortably.

"Of course, Miss Cleveland," said Blake. "If you really wish it—"

"I do wish it!" said Ethel earnestly.

"When you put it like that, deal gal, we can't vewy well wefuse!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "It would be ungentlemanly to wefuse, as a mattah of fact. But, although we agree, I am wathah uncertain about the other chaps."

"That's what I was thinking," said Figgins slowly. "As you really want Manners let-off we shall have to let him off. As you say, you're more concerned than anybody, and so have the biggest say in the matter. I suggest we collect the fellows together, and put it to them—they're nearly all in the quad."

"That is a splendid idea!" said Ethel eagerly.

"Wight-ho, deal gal; we will go and awwange mattahs!"

And the juniors hurried off, talking seriously. They did not exactly agree with cousin Ethel; in fact, they considered that Manners thoroughly deserved to be sent to Coventry. But Ethel's word was law, and had to be obeyed.

The girl watched the meeting under the elms. A big crowd had collected to listen to Blake's speech, and, after some amount of dissension, an agreement was arrived at. Then Blake & Co., Figgins & Co., and one or two others, hurried across to the little gate, and crowded round it.

"It's all sewene, deah gal!" said D'Arcy cheerfully. "The chaps have decided to agree to your suggestion. Mannahs has been wefused from Coventry, and ewerything will go on as usual."

Cousin Ethel looked relieved. "I'm so glad!" she said simply. "It's very good of you all!"

She bade them good-night without further ado, and walked quietly away. The juniors were rather disappointed, as they wanted to have a talk with her. But it was as well that cousin Ethel had left, for the juniors were neglecting their prep, as they now realised.

Ten minutes later the quad was practically deserted, and the two Houses were brilliant with illumination. In Tom Merry's study, in the Shell passage, the Terrible Three were hard at work, but Monty Lowther and Tom Merry cast curious glances now and again in Manners' direction.

And when prep was over, and the Terrible Three descended to the Common-room, Manners could not fail to notice a certain restraint in his chums' manner; almost imperceptible, but, nevertheless, apparent.

And Manners knew perfectly well that that restraint would be present until he had proved his innocence—until he had proved that he was exactly the opposite to a coward and a liar.

THE END.

Next Friday's Splendid, Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's is entitled

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